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**This Autumn Sky  
with  
Prof. Charles B. Tinkham**

Halloween skies  
Cover me in chills.  
Long nights bring  
Nightmares that vandalize  
My summer heart.  
But tonight, I surrender  
To candy temptations.  
This season,  
An overwhelming spell  
Of ghost dreams makes the leaves fall.

The miracle  
Of All Saints' Day  
Sends my mood swinging gayly.  
This moment,  
I yearn for the tobaccos  
Of the season.

I notice this morning,  
The fragrance of ghost women  
Out in the streets.  
I surrender to this daydream . . .

I drink apple cider.  
I drink coffee,  
And yield to the hallucinations  
Of October . . .

For the moment,  
I liberate myself from summer  
And spill my words  
Onto the autumn season.

The coffee kettle is boiling  
While my heart  
Is dandy and delirious . . . !

—*Jesus A. Gutierrez*  
*East Chicago, Indiana*

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This magazine publishes work by children and by adults on the acknowledged premise that children and more mature literary artists should be published side by side.

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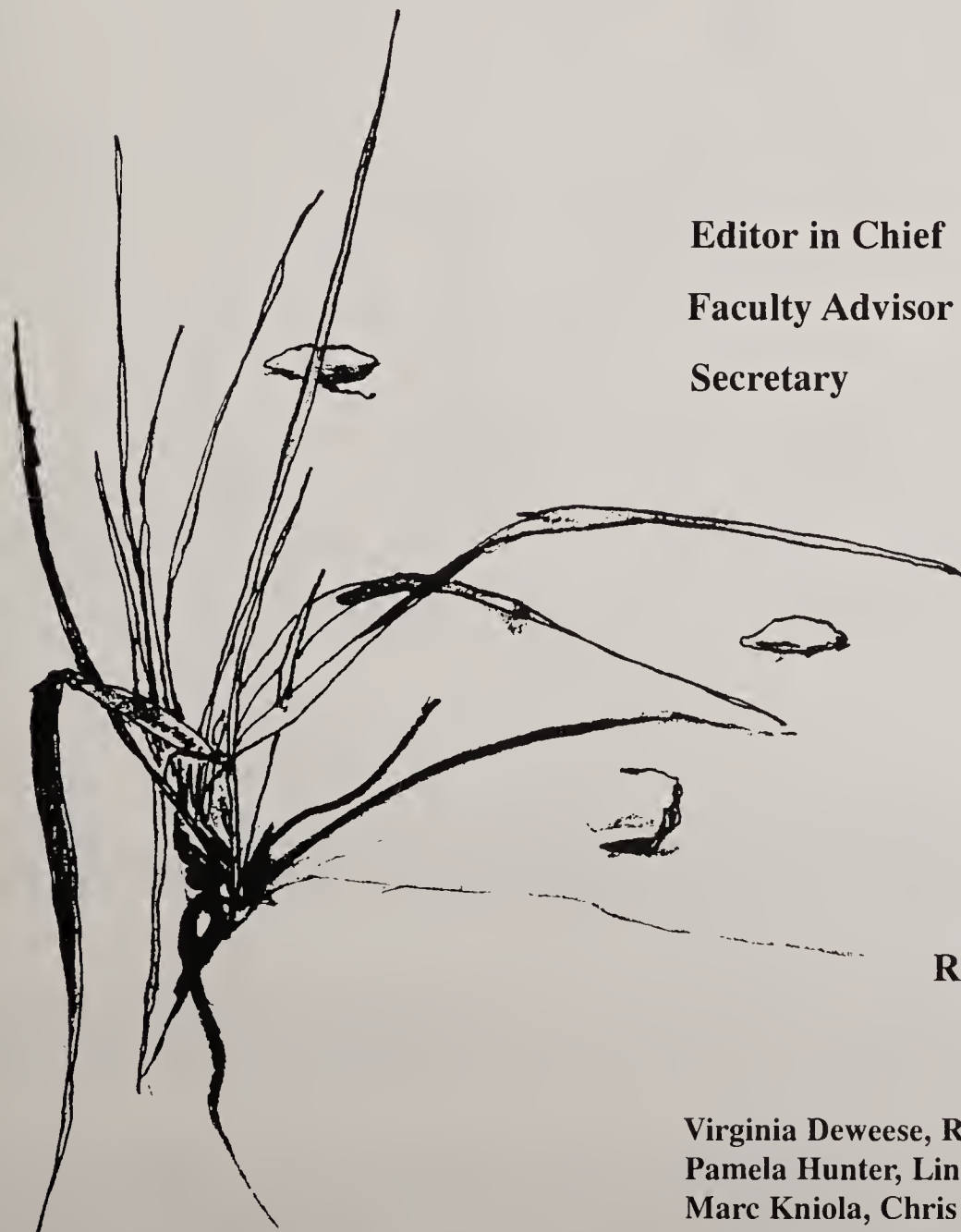
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## To the Reader

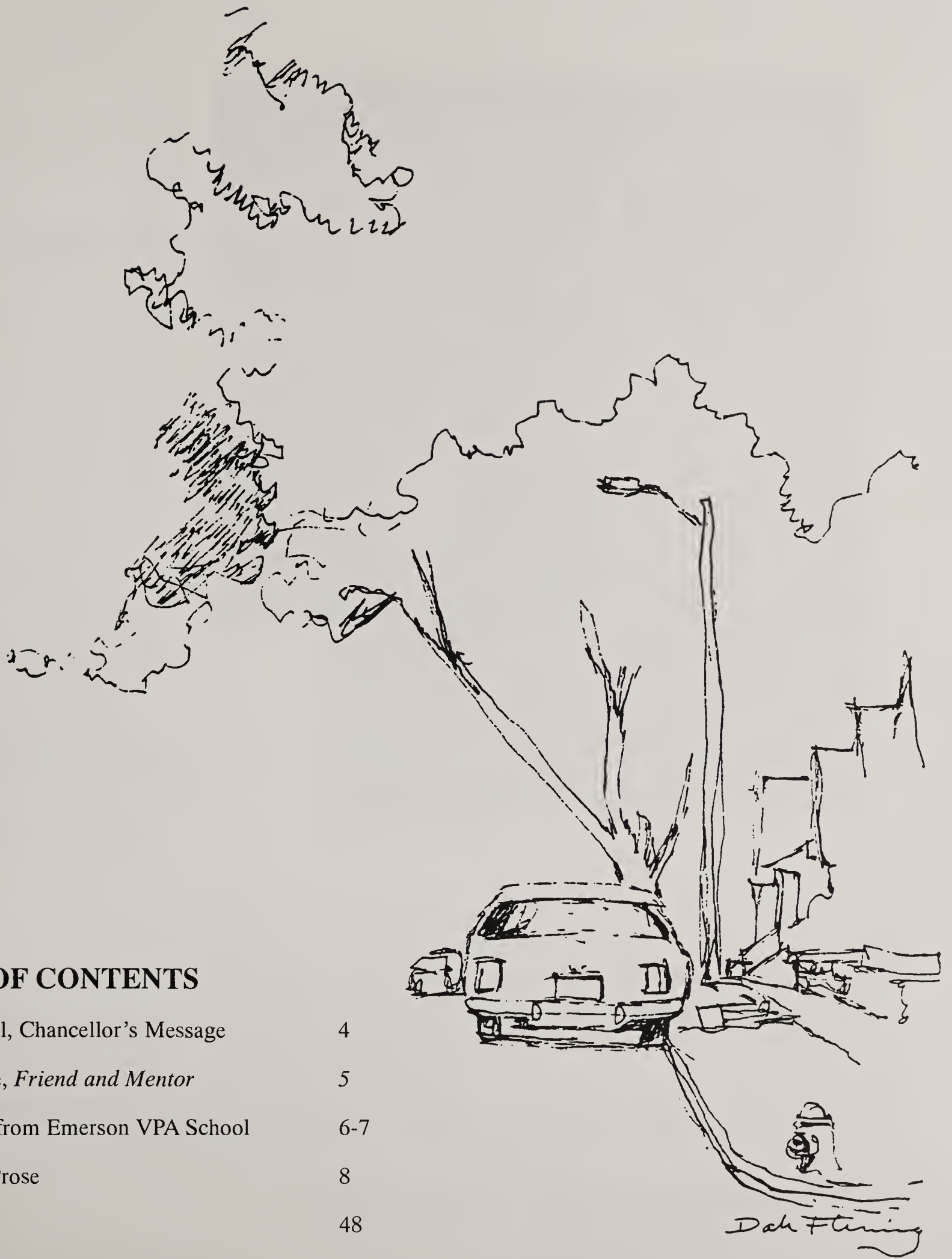
In this 26th edition of *Skylark*, my staff is offering a mosaic of poetry and prose. I, in turn, have chosen artwork to complement the text. Together, we are almost like the architect who designs a house and then creates the furnishings for it. Of course, each poem or short story here has merit to stand alone—just as each photograph or drawing does. However, we hope this arrangement of the verbal and the visual will simultaneously appeal to the eye and the mind.

Many individuals have helped us achieve our goal. And I especially wish to thank the following people: all of the friends of *Skylark* for their continual support; the artists who participate with such enthusiasm; the Department of Mathematics, Computer Science and Statistics for letting me dovetail my editorial job with secretarial duties; and Alice at Largus Printing for being a *brick* of a typesetter.

Also, I wish to thank my section editors and readers for giving every manuscript careful consideration. Finally, I appreciate the ingenuity Shirley Jo Moritz always brings to the *Young Writers Section* as editor and layout designer.

Now, just duck under the lintel and enjoy a tour of our latest literary arts magazine. — Pamela Hunter





## TABLE OF CONTENTS

James Yackel, Chancellor's Message	4
Henry White, <i>Friend and Mentor</i>	5
Eight Poets from Emerson VPA School	6-7
Poetry and Prose	8
Home	48
Young Writers	64
Shirley Jo Moritz, <i>Rejection Letters</i>	81
Index	88
Jesus Gutierrez, <i>This Autumn Sky</i>	(Inside front cover)
Charles B. Tinkham, <i>for Larry Eigner</i>	(Inside back cover)





*Photo courtesy of Purdue University Calumet  
Office of University Relations*

## ***SKYLARK***

**E**ach year I anticipate the publication of this fine collegiate literary magazine. The diverse styles, ideas, and contributors create apprehension as to whether one more edition will emerge as pleasing as its twenty five predecessors. At the same time, tradition creates an expectation for quality that each edition seems to fulfill. I believe the secret to this annual event is found in the leadership and dedication of Professor Charles Tinkham who serves as advisor to the editorial staff. He truly understands *SKYLARK*'s readers as well as its contributors.

I hope that you will enjoy this year's offering of *SKYLARK*.

***JAMES YACKEL***  
***Chancellor***



## CHARLES B. TINKHAM

### Friend and Mentor

On the prolific part  
of the continuum whereon we dwell,  
there are those few who stand out,  
bird of birds, lion of lions,  
defined by kindness of warm fires  
and tight roofs during cold, wet nights—  
defined again by love of art and humanity  
in giving of the self,  
the stuff of life if not its treasures.



*Courtesy of Skylark*

More friend than mentor,  
for under the canopy of friendship  
such friends are themselves treasures  
to be wrapped in warm embraces  
of their fellows' high esteem.  
They are cherished by all  
who recognize nobility of spirit,  
and raised to the world  
as examples to the subjects  
of the Beatitudes.

Such a one is Charles Tinkham,  
ever giving of himself,  
asking little in return  
beyond satisfaction of watching talent grow  
like well-tended gardens.  
He is eligible for highest accolades  
for his generosity  
and his daily, leonine courage,  
the bread of his kind,  
prevailing over piercing blades of adversity.

—Henry White  
Crown Point, Indiana



*These eight poets attend  
Emerson VPA School  
in Gary, Indiana*

## **They Just Don't Care**

They just don't care,  
Boy, I swear—  
They just don't care about us.  
They see us sitting down all depressed,  
Some old folks say we're just a mess.  
Most adults don't understand why  
We sit all night and just cry and cry.  
They don't even know why  
Some young kids want to die.  
Some kids don't even choose  
The right paths to live their lives by.

They just don't care,  
Boy, I swear—  
They just don't care about us.  
As I walk down the street,  
Watching drug doers meet,  
I can look into their eyes  
And tell they're high.  
Instead of noticing us,  
They're in the middle of the road trying to fly.  
I also see teenage girls  
With babies on each arm,  
When they don't even know a synonym for harm.  
They are out having sex,  
When they should be in the house watching *Star Trek*.

They just don't care,  
Boy, I swear—  
They just don't care about us.  
They're acting uneducated on the side of the curb,  
They don't even know how to conjugate a regular verb.  
They'll see what's happening,  
When they've ruined their lives,  
They'll realize all they had to do was strive.  
Remember, age ain't nothing but a number,  
Go to school so that you won't become dumber.

They just don't care,  
Boy, I swear—  
They just don't care about us.

—Charleena Robinson, Age 14

## **Hanging Around**

You hang around with your friends,  
Trying to be cool,  
When will you realize,  
You're nothing but a fool?

You smoke,  
You drink,  
When all you got to do is think.

You think you're having fun.  
But soon your life is done.

You ditch class,  
Go to the mall,  
You're ruining your life,  
That's all, that's all.

Don't hang out with friends  
that act bad,  
Or your life will be over,  
and that would be sad.

So, next time your friends  
want you to skip school,  
Just tell them,  
"No, because I'm no fool."  
—Terrance Campbell, Age 12

## **Wondering**

As I sit in my room, I wonder why  
we always have to fight.  
Why can't we just get along  
instead of hearing gunshots  
In the middle of the night?

As I sit in my room, I wonder why  
people just can't love each other,  
And not have all these kids  
lie and steal from their mothers.  
As I sit in my room, I wonder why  
people don't like other people,  
Just because of their race.  
I just can't understand  
This prejudice that is going around  
all over the place.

We all need to sit and talk  
about each other's problems,  
But until I see a change occur,  
all I can do is sit in my room  
And wonder.

—Lauren N. Kelley, Age 12

## **Where is the Love in This World Today?**

Where is the love in this world today?  
Is it in our hands, fingers or toes?  
Those who have guns, knives and weapons  
Are nothing but a bunch of foes.

Where is the love in this world today?  
Surely not in what gangs do.  
You stabbed, stole and killed our people,  
Are we supposed to be thankful to you?

God made this world for blacks and whites,  
Not just for you.  
Surely you'll look back on what you've done,  
And be thankful for what God has given you.

Where is the love in this world today?  
It should always be in our hearts.  
Killing generation after generation  
Will tear us all apart.

—KaSheena Green, Age 12



## The Problem with Gangs

All these young kids walking around being proud,  
And this is all because they're with the wrong crowd.  
When all the time they're not being cool,  
And their parents don't know they're not attending school.

Walking around wearing certain color headbands,  
And doing gang-related things when they are shaking hands.  
They're talking that dumb language they call slang.  
They're ruining their future lives for their so-called gang.

They're wasting all their time smoking funny cigarettes.  
And the names they answer to are pimps and pimpettes.

So, know the problem with gangs—  
They think it's cute, but in reality it's a shame.

—Tasha Avery, Age 13

## My Real Life Story

I thought that this subject was really funny,  
but look at me, I don't seem so sunny.

I thought that having a "special night" would be cool.  
Well, it's not, because I found out that I looked like  
a *straight-up fool*.

I didn't want my parents to know,  
so I tried to keep my pregnancy *under tow*.

I thought that my little plan would pull through,  
but it didn't, so look at all the trouble I went through.

I didn't even finish my education,  
because I couldn't cope with pregnancy's distractions.

I still remember that night when he said,  
"I won't get you pregnant; it's just all in your head.  
If you want, we can even use protection."  
"Just promise me you'll relieve all your tension."

After that night had ended,  
I thought that our relationship could never be *unmended*.  
But I found out I was wrong,  
because when I told him I was pregnant,  
he said, "Have a nice life because you're on your own."

This was the way I learned to trust myself,  
instead of someone who I barely knew, and couldn't even help.  
I wouldn't want anyone to feel even more sorry;  
that's why I'm telling my real life story.

—Karla Villacin, Age 14

## All On Me

When it was my turn to go  
to the free throw line,  
And the ref threw me the ball,  
All eyes were on me  
And the ball seemed oranger than ever.

The roars of the audience sounded  
like an African safari getting  
ready for a feast.  
The sounds were louder than ever.  
I dribbled the ball slowly.

The audience filled with silence—  
Like an Alaskan winter.  
I reached up and made my shot.  
My ball was like an angel  
And it went home to heaven—  
We won the game by one point!

—Krystal Stout, Age 13

## All of a Sudden, Out of the Blue

We were all outside at play  
When they came down our way.  
We thought they were just passing by  
But they had some beef with this guy.

He lived in our hood  
So he did all he could  
To convince them to go away  
And not come back another day.

All the little ones just kept on playing,  
And their parents just kept on praying.  
But they knew the whole time  
That guy was nothing but slime.

He didn't pay when he smoked others' weed,  
He didn't put in when they bought some speed.  
So they came down our way  
And were determined to stay.

Then all of a sudden, out of the blue,  
They shot that man and they shot us too.  
Nobody knew what for or why—  
And all our parents could do was cry.

Our parents were sad,  
Those people were glad.  
They had smoked us all  
Even though we were so small.  
All of a sudden, out of the blue,  
We are all so sad—how about you?

—Cami Thomas, Age 13

# Poetry

Christine Gibson  
(née Shrader)

*Editor*



# Prose

Virginia Deweese

Reinhard Fritz

Kristin Jensen

*Readers*

*Illustration by Jason Conn*



## Humming Along

*in the voice of my son Matthew*

I always knew my father's legacy would not bulge  
my bank account. He lived otherwise. He died

stacking wood, quick as that, leaving all he loved  
one September morning that brought the first

hard frost to central Vermont. He left me volumes  
of books, flannel shirts sharp with woodsmoke,

a lifetime's music, much of which had made him cry  
and, now, makes me cry. It's true. He knew.

He had surprises in things he left behind,  
little explosions for me to find and move me in his absence:

a Coltrane tape peppered with readings  
of his sinewy poems of the wildest beauty and pain;

a photo in a book he knew I'd open one day;  
an *I Love You* planted in some obscure spot he knew

I'd one day look. So on this star-kissed winter night  
I put on a Jackson Browne tape I'd made for him years ago,

songs that spoke to us at our different altitudes.  
"Everyman." Midway through the first cut I hear humming,

then something thunking, over and over,  
*thunking*. And the humming. *My God! He's hidden this for me.*

He's forced me to hear him at his work, doing what  
needed doing, part of a life he prized, stacking wood.

I stop the tape. Then start it again. *He's set me up,*  
*pictured me doing this!* As always, he's written the script.

And on the plastic case he's penciled something I need  
my glasses to read: "Be well—I love you."

—Paul McRay  
Strafford, Vermont

## Six Dozen Flies To Make A Meal

Red-headed lizards,  
like indigenous people,  
hunt and fish for their survival.  
Almost daily, I watch mine  
travel toward the rising sun  
in cool, damp grass,  
returning, sated, toward day's end.

I sometimes catch it stopped,  
head raised above the grass line,  
studious of my ways.  
And every chance I get  
to observe its passing,  
I note its travel habits.

The lizard's day is filled with ritual,  
and I worry about its boredom,  
but then it takes six dozen flies  
to make a meal  
and there are no taxis for the lizard.

—Harding Stedler  
Cabot, Arkansas

## The Morgue at Quang Tri

The day,  
Neil Armstrong stepped onto the moon,  
the Morgue at Quang Tri was full,  
too full. They had to place the bodies  
out in the halls of the hospital.  
A day enshrined forever in the annals of man,  
but the face of the Great Nation was turned away;  
they saw the bright face of the moon, not the filth  
nor the blood, and the day,  
Neil Armstrong stepped on the moon,  
the Morgue at Quang Tri was too full.

—William R. Ford, Jr.  
Lansing, Michigan

## The Kind Of Light That Glows But Never Blinds

The kind of light that glows but never blinds  
is in the stuff that creeps through every cell.  
It celebrates bones and ignites the mind.

True gifts of light are strung like Christmas twine.  
They shiver through our sense of sight and shall  
never be the kind of light that glows and blinds.

It is the stuff that gives all thought design.  
It glows like a coal in each kiss and spell,  
celebrates the bones and ignites the mind.

It shivers through our drams and D.N.A.,  
spins through the memory like a carousel.  
This kind of light must glow but never blind.

It is far older than the ties that bind,  
more dependable than heaven—when hell  
seeps into the bones and ignites the mind.

This is the kind of stuff we should enshrine  
in every poem we write and tale we tell.  
The kind of light that glows but never blinds  
celebrates the bones and ignites the mind.

—Fredrick Zydek  
Omaha, Nebraska

## Blue Tulips

Expected, they will come, come like Tuesday.  
The tireless roots—forcing downy cups  
twisted tight for shoving through soil,  
oak twigs, the grass's last spread—  
drank the snow, settled, melted,  
come wet, heavy, dissolving as it fell,  
disappearing in the air as mist,  
some seeping to the granite's grain  
of hard channel, expanding earth, defying  
the packing pull to the core.

They will come, the deep cups.  
The pasque flowers will rise up for praise,  
for the tension of the wind, blues gathering  
in open pasture as grey horses group for night.  
Though I want to see the push, to dig  
into the black earth's knowledge,  
to hold truest treasure,  
without setting the spade,  
I wait for the first,  
the blue coming for belief.

—Sandra Gail Teichmann  
Canyon, Texas

## One Manic Moment

She was a golden sun that afternoon,  
A butterfly  
floating above the flowers,  
Red jersey blouse  
bright above her dancing feet  
fast and light  
on the old worn carpet.

Once, only once I saw her so.

One manic moment in my memory,  
A surprising  
red hot sliver of joy,  
Flickering on the edge  
of the icy canyon,  
nestling in the  
frigid hills of depression.

That one time I warmed myself at her little flame,  
Gleaming, unsmothered  
by the weight of despair,  
Her short  
sweet dance of connection,  
before returning  
to the darkness of her dwelling.

I try to hold that piece of her in my mind,  
But my fingers slip  
on the red silk shirt as I cry,  
“Stay, stay with me,  
keep the fire alive.”  
But she, like Persephone,  
is called home again.

—Mariane Kulick  
Delray Beach, Florida

## Preserves

For years she forced tomatoes  
into glass jars to preserve them  
like I do the overripe lines in books  
that stand Argus-eyed on my office shelf  
awaiting the day when all time  
will stop and we can sit stockstill  
on a blazing September afternoon  
and pluck lush tomatoes from  
vines beyond the threat of  
killing frost and describe them  
in poems that will never grow old,  
forgetting at last why we ever needed  
the safety of glass jars or notebooks.

—Tom Brand  
Plymouth, Minnesota





# WEIGHT AND WEIGHTLESSNESS

*by Earl M. Coleman*

Sometimes Marco, in the heavy two o'clock, would groan to find himself awake once more, inside the heartsickening texture of the night, when what he wanted only was to rest his bones, or have the fullest use of them, or quiet them, obliterate rheumatic hurt, encumberment. Body was irrelevant but insistently obtrusive. His body, his, in all its ponderous, no longer supple, flesh. Importunate. As always. Always that: a factory disgorging to his arteries its burden of disgust with self, a kind of slurry, clogging passages to vision where the splintered yellow overlaid the shadow just beneath. How did he dare to freight the canvas with the colors of his clumsy brush, his fingers, spatulate, skin cracked, screaming at

him, "Torturer! Why are you taxing us?"

He burrowed, tried to wind the ragged filaments of sleep around his knotted shoulders, remembering those years ago, as so often in these moments of the night, that prehistoric time when threads of sleep in all their ten-year innocence had gathered to his agile fingers readily. His mother in the lamplight, kneeling, praying with him by the bed. "If I should die before I wake." The light refracted by her eyes. Her pupils' luminosity, their chocolate depth, their shine, soft as flannel, like the bathrobe that she draped him in, her fingers fastening, pressing, tugging his belt, pulled him close to her. "Marco, Marco. Do you know I love you, Marco, more than anything?" Her golden hair. "You are my life,

my love." How he would fall asleep.

Did he weigh sixty pounds then with his legs like pistons racing after balls as though the street was surf and he was wind and sailing was his every day, his tack and veer darting through the corridors at school, the traffic of his ten o'clock? Quicksilver in his pirate days, he'd only sketched some street lamps then, the auditorium, his Phys Ed teacher, Mr. LoBianco's head, because the wart was on the nostril's flange and seemed improbable. Some chairs at home. The stoop. Soon after, he took his sketch pad with him everywhere, his sharpened Mongol 2. A bit of carbon wrapped in toilet paper in his pocket with



the lint.

And if he had—renounced the world at 21? Would life have changed? His life? Lumpy mattresses, the flagellation of the soul, all that was nothing, zip, for wasn't that an every day? He'd said how could he offer anything to God; himself, or even more impossible, his work, when he was fierce about his talent, genius, who knew what it was, puffed up with pride, and only passionate about his way of seeing, seeing, yes, with eyes at open, breathlessly aware, the blaze of sunset fires banking down, the moon's explosion on the water glass upon the sill.

**B**efore him always Hopkins how he burned ice-cold, his chisel to the words, reshaping Dialog; and praised God's name. Could it have been creature matters, only that, his bestial qualities, the torment of the flesh, his cowardice, that made him turn away? Or was a competition raging here? With whom? The Man, the Maker? Mastery he struggled for?

He heaved over on his left side beneath the quilt and groaned again. The heat was tropical. Then why not rip the covers off, late May? Because already it was growing from him like an amaryllis bursting through the soil. Because it was the Two O'clock. Because his body never had been shared, his body with his sixty years of it, his servitude.

It wanted him. Demanded him. His breath came short and he could feel each crease, each fiber of the cloth, as he sprouted, grew against, aggrandized till he thought he'd grown a pole, waxed exquisite, pulsed and throbbed and felt the urging for his hands to touch it, grip it, animal, unspeakable, as though the nether world and all its gravity had drawn him like a file, heavy as he was, his hairy parts, the silken, meaty shaft, the building of suspenseful blood, the urgency, the need, and then the tremor, shock, the oh, the million sperm now dying, spewed upon the sheet the oh, it spasmed on, Priapus rutting at his roughened hands, the gism bathing them like dew, the oh, unbearable, although it slowed and quieted and stopped, his hands all gluey with himself, at rest, his creature still. Was it now satiated, gorged, his goatishness, and could he sleep?

\* \* \*

How the dawn astonished him, throwing through Victorian lead border glass and bevels all the fractured purples, reds. He stood winded on the landing although he'd only walked ten slippered steps, bathrobe open, neighbors not about this early let them look, his hairy graying matted chest, his dangling thing, the empty six o'clockness of the street, the innocence of sky. His hands hung heavy, slabs of meat on hooks, his fingers sausages, but oh his heart exultant at the sparrow on the sill, the light, the light now crashing on the floor. Drunk on pink, his eye hinged on the green which shivered to an aqua as it hit the sash. His lungs filled to their bursting point, his heart pumped hard and leaden feet and all, a joy despite himself pervaded him and he continued his descent on screaming stairs, a walnut banister, and used the bathroom on the second floor.

Why endless minutes peering at his stool as if evincing auguries, fingering his cheekbones, tugging at the corners of his eyes? His body was contaminant—then why the fixity, intensity, the searching probe, the magnifying glass? Stiff fingers kneaded, pulled, left imprints on the slack skin underneath the jaw, the bags beneath the eyes. Exploded veins. Would it never let him be, this excrescence, lump of clay, this dross?

Eyes like one of Schiele's lost ones in the glass, the nose Picasso's granite slab. Puffy cheeks were those of some roué, hair receding now, made wild by night's encounter with the bedding, pillow-case.

Silence, silence in the house, crash of water on the porcelain, cascades from craggy heights. Hokusai's great waves of lather curled along his cheeks, arctic white against the earth of nose, black stubble peering through the swathe along the jawbone at the ear. There was a line, gone instantly as the razor plowed the snow away, a line that froze his hand, arrested him, blade poised, the drifts of soap, the warm of skin's arroyos. Enough distraction, body works, attention paid. The day awaited his beginning it.

\* \* \*

The cherrywood's patina still glowed even though the stairs protested at his weight. How old were they, 120 years, stiff and groaning now? Up he'd crawled, mama right

behind, to scoop him in her arms triumphant at the top, his earliest, this memory, the year before his father died and what remained? a moustache, truant lock of hair, a black apostrophe across the brow, twinkling yellow eyes. How had she managed then, the taxes, food, back then before this plague of affluence transformed to figure heads each citizen, black widows all, or widowers, with spider threads of gold. Painting as commodity. Monotypes as coin. His priceless watercolors bore a price. An orange sold for fifty cents. Imagine that.

The kitchen needed paint, a Hopper kitchen, wide and spare, the early morning light staring blank into the panes to illuminate linoleum worn down around the sink. He drank tomato juice.

In the sevenish he thrilled with the anticipation of spade-like fingers digging in the earth, down on his knees, pressed into loamy soil as though this was as much of Eden as he'd know, things growing, miracle enough. Cauliflower, cukes, romaine, were only vegetables as Guernica was only canvas loaded down with oils. This temple that he'd made. This recognition of élan vital.

Something—what?—seemed wrong as he let himself out the back door—exploding from his vegetables some little boys. How many? Galvanized, he ran, the boys all mercury, squirting over fence and gate, and one, a tiny one, trapped by barriers or height or mass and he, heart racing, panting, running, turning, then granite, stiffly blocking, the boy now cowering behind the broccoli.

He crouched beside him, heaving air. Now what, what, the little frightened face, sneakers unlaced, cheeks satin black, close-cut, kinky hair? The boy flinched at his heavy, reached-out hand but he rested it on the coarse clipped hair. This child. What was he, 8?

"What's your name?" he panted so hard he slurred the words, the damage minimal that he could see, some trodden soil, a broken carrot, top missing somewhere.

"Amika, mister," just above a whisper in the early light, brown-black eyes distrustful.

"Amika." They looked fully at each other. Saw. His breath slowed. "I like it." His voice



seemed loud to him, the day just starting out. "Does it mean something?"

"My name, Amika? I don't know." He shifted, more confident. "You mad at me?"

Breathing normally again, his heart breathless only with the light on buildings, on the apple tree, on the small face, undertones of cobalt, umber, velvet grasses darkly breaking through. "Mad? At you?" He sat, the jeans just loose enough, dribbles, drops of pain, a Pollock denim. "No, Amika. Angry, no. I'm not mad at anything." He waved his strong, stiff fingers at the growing crop. "Don't hurt my vegetables. OK?" He stood and extended his right hand. "Up you go."

\* \* \*

Bowl of milk outside for Katmandu. Garden weeded, tidied, raked. Sketch pad, pencils in the tote bag. Veggies, garlic, left-over lamb. The day was gold. It waited for the wonders of his unworthy hands, stiffly setting the latch. All in readiness. He left.

He walked as always with a rolling gait, a sailor home on leave although he'd never been one, a fighter long since quit the ring. Bulkied up with open mackinaw he seemed a listing freighter as he proceeded toward the subway entrance a thousand yards away. The black beret—an affectation he permitted to himself, a vanity. Few enough.

Once on the train no one cared or stopped what they were doing, talking, reading the News, hanging on the bar, braced against the door. Just another crazy—drawing, not a threat. Eye contact only by a fluke. Line and mass, no more, a scribbled note sometimes suggesting color, underpaint, warm-up exercise this hour trip from Queens, part, part of the work.

It felt good, being in the building first. Dead silence. He walked the three flights to his studio, always walked. An hour and a half once stuck between the floors, the ancient elevator with its rattly gate, the little jerk before the gear took hold, the whine. When he had had the studio on eleven, then, oh with the skylight like an opening on Heaven, then he'd used the elevator, riding lordly to the top. The wonders that the skylight brought to him. Now the bastards wanted what—twenty something grand a year, just

rent, not buying anything. As it was, what did he pay—\$921.17 a month for less than half the space he'd had, no skylight, lucky to have two windows and be right across the hall from the john and the landlord looked the other way at the tiny two-burner range to perk some coffee, make his veggie stew, with oh so rarely, bits of meat. What landlord?—managers, all corporations now, how much money they could gouge.

His hand trailed the banister, mahogany, his footsteps hollow on the marble stairs, the staircase maybe six feet wide. The way they used to build them then.

Neat. You had to keep things neat. Compact, with just the miserly space they let you have for all the money they wrung out of you. His case, they swore a captain used to keep his maps in it, flat out. He'd paid ten dollars maybe forty years ago in the junk shop long before they called everything antique and jacked the price up fifty times. It organized the etchings, but not all, never all. He'd be lost without it. Along the wall he'd built a rack, two-tiers, four decades worth of oils and watercolors, all his periods. Pastels, works in progress, tacked up on the walls, housed in wood cabinets, ancient thread chests.

**H**e put the train sketches with the others in a special drawer and began to take the zucchini, carrots, peppers, garlic out of the paper bag but was caught by the way the light from his lousy two windows hit them. He framed them in his mind, made the composition happen, garlic there, and sketched them rapidly in his book. He tried a new arrangement and included the bag, the random crinkles, shadowed hollows. He put the sketches to the side, let them sit, breathe in the air, compose themselves.

He tuned to *NPR*. They were playing Mozart's Flute Concerto #1. Close to Heaven. Held down here below.

\* \* \*

Despite the buildings blocking it, dodging overhangs and concrete racing to the sky, the sun threw swathes and bars of gold on couch and radio, along the northern wall to light some watercolors carrying on their dialog

with him. The greenness of the thumbtacks holding them in place.

All afternoon, his fingers in a war against their stiffness, clumsiness, unwillingness to do his bidding, translate the thought. Something, there was something the bag was saying to him. What could he learn from it? Experimented: closed, upstanding, turned away, the veggies spilling from it like a cornucopia. None of it worked. The eggplant was a problem. Put it on the side. The scallions, no.

He went to take a piss and on the instant knew he moved inside a dream, knew and didn't know, anticipating freedom that was on its way, moving at a pace no longer his. He flushed.

He crossed the hall and opened up his door and OH the sun along the wall and OH he gasped the way it swept the table where he worked. He scooped up vegetables, moved them to the couch. Arranged the bag so that it yawned, laid on its side, awaiting goodies of the earth or emptied of them finally, the sun creating dark and bright and clarity, a blessed clarity was his and OH his breath came fast, heart pounding furious, his fingers now in his command.

Body that was chaos, body that was chains, had eyes to see the color, shape and form.

And now his pencil flew, his fingers nimble as the hills that skipped like rams, and from his shoulders all the weight sloughed off, so light, light-headed, he had to work with all his feverish intensity just to nail his body, nail it to the here and now before it floated off, and OH he *saw* it, saw the unimaginable beauty of the grocery bag, the blazing contrast of the ecru almost tan, the deepest burnt sienna mixed with black although for now no time for color, sketched a dozen roughs in seconds flat, not even changing angle, no time for notes for miracles; revolutionizing line, imposing order on the world.

*Earl M. Coleman lives in Montville, New Jersey.*



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## Red Tide

I understand it's an algae which can prompt  
in humans sniffles, harsh coughs, and difficulty  
breathing but which kills fish, even big ones,  
sharks four-feet long and longer, taking  
from the water oxygen they need, and it was my knowledge  
heavy rains in summer and the early fall can  
trigger an outbreak in the Gulf made me wonder  
today, between the nearly-daily thunderstorms  
defining life recent weeks on Sarasota Bay,

wading out for a swim, if the eerie yellow-green  
light, thick like pea soup in the water meant trouble.  
I hadn't seen it earlier. Approaching the shore  
from the parking lot, I caught my breath at the beauty  
of the beach as if this were the first time I'd walked  
this course in late afternoon, the clouds rolling  
in the sky making a diaphanous screen  
diffusing the sun's light, erasing the horizon, making  
earth and heaven one, a lone white sail far out to sea

the sole reminder that the pale, misty blue facing me  
was not the same as that above my head. But this is it,  
it *wasn't* blue, any shade of azure, once I'd walked out  
in it but, instead, this alien shade of green, this color  
so unnatural to it yet—this the basic source of  
my shock—utterly natural. I went ahead and began  
swimming, despite the strange appearance of the water,  
though staying mostly on my back, my head above the surface,  
as I wouldn't have had I felt as much at home as generally

I do when exercising in these waters. With eyes open wide,  
in this mode, I noticed the first evidence I could not ignore  
red tide had struck and then, suddenly, it seemed there were  
scores of the same white underbellies of suffocated fish  
bobbing with the waves all around me. Righting myself,  
I dog-paddled quickly into shore, watching carefully the water  
before every stroke I made, wanting to avoid touching death,  
fearing that the feel of soft cool fish flesh would tell me more  
than I needed yet to know, alive, of my own and wishing yet to live.

Later, sitting on the beach after rinsing off beneath a shower,  
I watched flocks of pelicans flying in formation like squadrons  
of bombers just feet above the water but, for reasons I thought  
I understood, not diving. And then, to my surprise, a pod of dolphins  
appeared in and around the site of my swimming and just yards  
from where a dozen visitors from France, having traveled too far  
to worry about algae, played. Dorsal fins rising and then  
disappearing with that rhythm defining grace, they circled  
in the pastel mist as if I were dreaming, the mystery in reality.

—Len Blanchard  
Sarasota, Florida

## Hurricane

Suddenly  
splashed by a wave,  
the salt stings my eyes  
and invades my nose  
before I can shield my face,  
distorted now in tears  
beating down my cheeks  
like a violent storm.  
On a vulnerable coast,  
grief subsides  
only until  
the next storm arrives  
in a season  
which will last  
a lifetime.

—Jacqueline Jules  
Arlington, Virginia

## Immortality

There's not going to be anything  
left of me, the atheist oyster boo hoos  
no life after death  
no heaven or hell  
just some grayish limbo like a damp  
featureless fog

A sweet little voice pipes up  
you've got your immortality  
your bony bumpy unpretty shell  
lingers on earth  
if not your orange and ruffled inside

You're even more useful  
ground up for a driveway  
left whole for an ashtray  
which is better than the worm  
that ends up as bird dung  
worse than the spiral shell  
—a nautilus, say—  
who echoes the sound of the sea

—Mary Winters  
New York, New York





## Nine

You were always afraid  
of dragonflies and cockroaches.  
I got you to listen to the Beatles  
only when I convinced you  
they were human,  
and you were only nine.  
You didn't want to believe  
that the radiant roses  
on our picnic table  
would allow  
a certain admission  
of fluffy bees;  
the buzzing I heard  
from your tree house  
contained  
those nagging insect fears,  
yet who expected  
a grown-up entomologist  
to calm me down  
when I was attacked  
in my dream  
by killer ants.

—B. Z. Niditch  
Brookline, Massachusetts

## Blue

You remind me of my younger self  
swallowing aches  
which blued my throat  
erecting a dam,  
blue,  
between my vocal chords—  
one twanging with the acceptable,  
the other, blue, taut with silence.  
This blue one sprouted roots  
in a hoarse darkness,  
blue roots,  
like frozen tongues  
coiled around that muffled indigo  
choking underground  
which eloped with yours,  
one day,  
when you opened your lock,  
for a moment,  
to let your blueness flow.

—Marlene Barsoum  
New York, New York

## Hidden Sparkle

My soul wandered  
off and got lost.  
I hastened to  
follow its dim  
astral traces  
to a rock-strewn  
mountain. The gems  
were beautiful—  
agate, quartz,  
topaz, precious  
matrices.

Was my soul,  
knowing my weakness  
for jewels, hiding  
under one?  
As I dallied in  
choosing, I saw  
a pebble, gray,  
striated  
in black and white.

I picked it up.  
And lo, my soul,  
lying underneath,  
arose  
to embrace me.

—Dorothy Harrington  
Los Angeles, California





## IT WAS ALL A SIMPLE MISUNDERSTANDING

*by Robert Sech*

**T**he boys' cross-country coach at my high school never seemed to understand the concept of running without the element of competition. By contrast, I never understood why anyone would want to ruin the beauty of a run by making it competitive.

Eleven years ago when I was a high school freshman, running had already been a part of my life for about two years. I had been introduced to it by my father, who used to jog leisurely at night during the summer months.

He never pushed me to run with him, but when I was in seventh grade, I asked him if I could join him on one of his nocturnal jaunts. He went with me to a local sporting-goods store and bought me a pair of running shoes. They were a pair of white Adidas with three maroon stripes on the sides.

After that, I joined him on many occasions. He continued to run at night to avoid the day's heat. We ran through the streets of our neighborhood and the two parks in town, often talking about whatever came to mind

but occasionally completing the entire trek without saying a word. We never ran on a structured program, choosing instead to run as far as we felt like going. It was important, my dad said, "to not push yourself too hard and to enjoy the sights and sounds of running."

I relished the runs we had along Forsythe Park, a large tree-filled park on the western edge of town. Jogs through here offered a panoramic view of a factory nearby which was adorned with hundreds of lights. Workers with hard-hats busily loaded semi-trucks with products. Smokestacks shot steam into the sky, and the continuous operation of the factory's machinery created a hum which made it a little harder to hear yourself losing your breath as the run progressed.

Weekend runs along the shores of Lake Michigan brought more of the same. Heading south along tiny Whihala Beach, you would catch glimpses of the Amoco Oil Refinery and the Inland Steel plant several miles away. Views to the north enabled you to view the grand and magical skyline of Chicago, replete with skyscrapers and so many lights that the city seemed to have a soft, evening glow which stretched all the way to the clouds.

I tried running track in eighth grade. Dad never hinted that I should attempt it, but I figured maybe I would be wasting time if I chose not to. I ran the mile. Unlike the happy anticipation I experienced before going out on a run with my dad or by myself, each race brought a nervous stomach and the wholly unappealing thought that the person next to me at the starting line was not a companion, but an enemy; a person to be hated; an opponent against whom you had to run faster. This was amplified by the fact that the mile was always the last event of the day at track meets. I never won any ribbons or trophies, and my heart was never in it. I loved the fitness and scenic aspects of running, but the taste of competition was one I could live without.

I continued to run several times a week by myself during the summer. When fall came, I entered high school. In gym class, I was approached nearly every week by the cross-country coach, a gruff man with greyish-



brown hair whose name was Jim Tarka. He was also the boys' physical education teacher, and it was clear by the screaming he inflicted on the non-athletes that he did not favor the students who placed academics over athletics. It was also clear he wanted me to try out for the cross-country team.

"Sech," he growled as he cornered me, "I heard you're a runner!"

"Yeah. . . I like to run."

"Why aren't you running on the (cross-country) team?" he asked. His tone of voice suggested a threat, not an enthusiastic inquiry into my status as a runner. I knew that based on my grade school track experiences, it just was not for me.

"Well, coach," I said, "I just like to run for the sake of running." I could barely raise my eyes to give him a response as he glowered over me. "I don't like to run in competition, you know? I run to stay in shape." I had discovered Dr. Sheehan's writings about the placid solitude running provided and read them voraciously, but I didn't bring them up now. I doubt Tarka had even heard of Dr. Sheehan, much less read what he had written.

He rolled his eyes, and his scowling appearance made it clear that he was less than pleased with my response. "How stupid, Sech," he retorted. "You could be out there, and you just don't care." The exchange was over, but it would be repeated several times in nearly the same fashion when track season rolled around in the spring. Whenever we ran races in gym class, Tarka would throw barbs my way and mumble needlings to me about me "wasting my potential" and "not giving it all I had." I didn't care. My primary objective in high school was to learn in the classroom, not to struggle with him every day in an attempt to "fulfill my potential."

What I did fulfill was my desire to continue running along the shores of Lake Michigan near my house. Throughout high school, jogs along the shores and the railroad tracks next to those shores provided wonderful relief from the stresses of study. The terrain along my lakeshore route was composed of mostly dirt, sand, and stones. On windy days, I heard the waves crashing into the shore and saw the seagulls coasting

between the sand and the water. On other days, the air was so still and surroundings so quiet that the only sounds heard were the rustling of the ground squirrels and rabbits who lived along the railroad tracks.

And of course there were trains. The sets of tracks along the lakeshore provide a main link between Chicago, the steel mills along the Indiana shores, and the eastern United States. There were locomotives emblazoned with the vibrant logos of every major rail carrier from Union Pacific to Amtrak. When the trains came past, I would never miss a chance to wave and smile at the engineer. Rare was the occasion when one would not return my greeting. If the train was stopped or moving slowly, an engineer might ask me how my run was going. It was about as far away from competition as you could get, and I relished every minute of it.

College allowed more of the same. I delighted in taking long runs around the Purdue University campus and meandering outside the campus boundaries to explore country roads and farms. During the summers, I even entered a few races and found that I enjoyed them. It was never me against

all of the others, but me against myself and the clock. I would see the same people race after race, and occasionally we would talk about that day's race and about running in general. Nearly all of them ran because it was a change of pace from the daily grind, a chance for them to "run around and play." These people smiled before a race. One of them, a tall lanky lawyer with glasses named Jerry, even told jokes as the races began.

Seven years have passed since my high school graduation, and I still run for the same reasons that I did when running with my dad back in grade school. To me, a run was, and still is, a break from life, a chance to explore and see people, places, and things you normally don't get to see. Running is more than just a chance to beat another person to the finish line. As Dr. Sheehan once wrote, it is "not a question, but an answer." Perhaps Jim Tarka should read one of Dr. Sheehan's columns or books to get an "answer" as to why I never joined the cross-country team.

*Robert Sech lives in Whiting, Indiana.*





## Relationships

He was so dull, so dull, you tired  
of him even when he wasn't around,  
but then, he was the type who didn't  
fall in love, no, he just had relationships  
with women who only had relationships  
and never fell in love either, of course,  
relationship people are different from  
love people.

—Rod Farmer  
Farmington, Maine

## The Last Drop

"We're creatures of conflict," she mused,  
Smiling sadly into the cinnamon-  
Sprinkled surf of her cooling coffee.  
"I thought that was comfort," he sighed,  
Stirring the fading warmth in his matching cup.

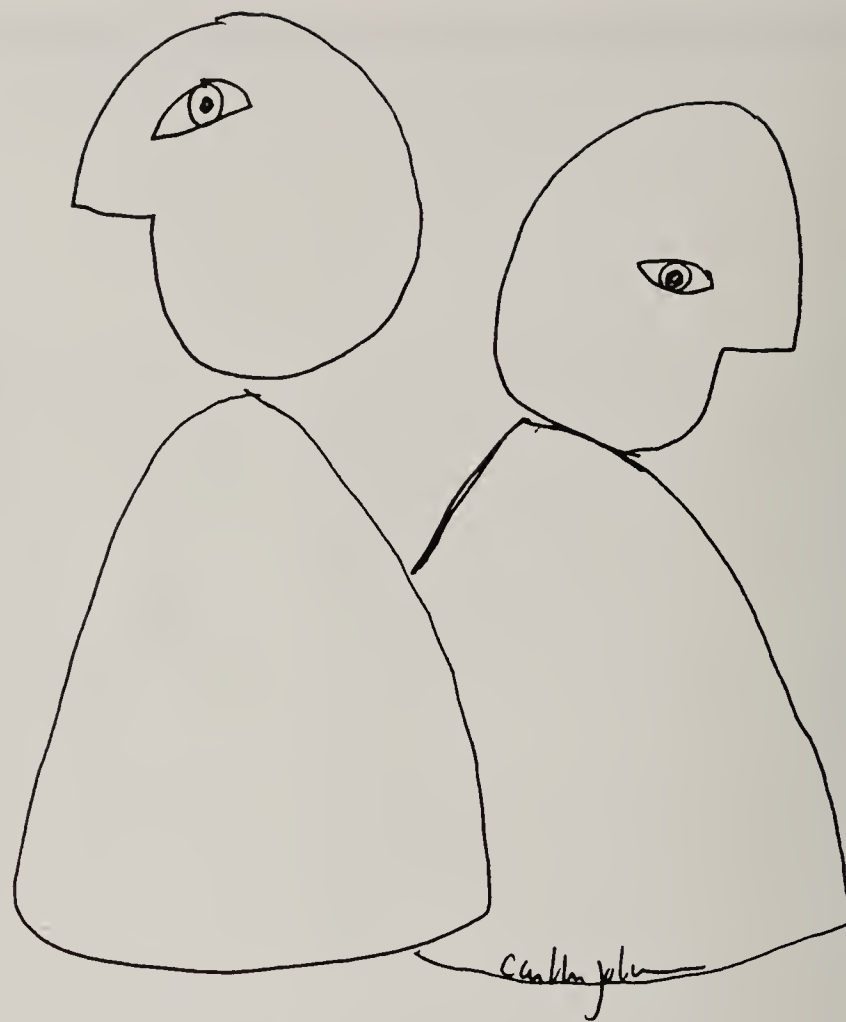
Another mayfly smile fluttered closely,  
Her features regaining the sparkler stars of July:  
Brief and bright, twinkling humor.  
"The lunatics, lovers, and poets  
All understand—Why don't you?"  
  
Holding back a beehive's volley of stings,  
He instead reflected on what he thought  
He always knew and wanted:  
An intricate mind, an ardent heart, and a kindred soul  
All in her—Can't she see?

Unable to interpret her Delphic glance,  
He turned to another muddled oracle and watched  
Its disparate elements strive to stay in one, warm form.  
"The coffee growing cold still shimmers  
With the resonance of us," he thought.

Indeed, the coffee and its companion cream struggled  
With each other and within;  
Still, they managed to mix in time.  
But she steeled herself, turning sour  
And separating, rather than embracing this one.

So he finally knew—yes, he finally  
Conceded—that he'd soon lose her;  
Then, looking again from his cup  
To the cupped hands below her distant stare,  
He knew that he already had.

—Marc D. Kniola  
La Porte, Indiana



## Mask

When I began to unravel,  
the descent was slow,  
undetected to even  
the most observant eye.

It was only later,  
after I'd been wound  
secure again,  
I realized  
that it had ever happened.

Unnoticed differences appeared—  
in walking, lethargy seeping  
through my stream  
like a ruthless polluter;  
talking without speaking;  
listening without absorbing  
the unsaid, content  
to pretend to have heard.

Anger denied  
the comfort of my heart  
to those who hungered  
to live there—

a savior  
from exactly  
what I needed to save me.

—Laura Belcic  
Leonora, New Jersey

## Return To Light

Breaths spilled from him  
into the sheets, a fading  
dream he fought to see  
to its uncertain end.  
Face up, he saw forever  
across the hovering night.  
So cold, it was so cold  
as he was drifting free  
of space and time, no longer  
holding on to anything he knew.  
What mattered most: he was  
home in his own bed, while wife  
and daughter and her future  
husband, resilient as  
the dawn, slept fitfully,  
still dreaming of that  
gradual return to light.

—Steven Sher  
Corvallis, Oregon



## Empty Hours

We take the same elevator,  
we enter the same door.  
So proper in your demeanor,  
so correct in your stand.  
Empty smiles, emptier words,  
years of quiet civility.

We share an office, we exchange words,  
we even share ideas.  
You inquire politely, I answer equally so.  
But mostly we sit divided.  
You in your world, I in mine.

We come together in meetings,  
sometimes we even agree.  
I gather documents to prove a point,  
often you back me up.  
I sometimes cover for you,  
sometimes you'll do the same.

We go to lunch occasionally.  
For one hour we exchange words.  
Empty words, shielded emotions.  
Never once dropping our guards.

A few months later we'll do it again,  
we'll appear to be cordial.  
Most of the time we succeed.  
We will sit and smile,  
sneaking looks at the clock.

Your son graduated medical school,  
your daughter made you a grandparent.  
Your wife is having surgery.  
Your car stopped on you again.  
Polite conversation, never from the heart,  
never reaching the heart.

I look into your eyes, what do I see?  
Fear? Distrust? Loathing?  
I cannot always tell; you are too clever;  
you hide it too well.

Devoid of honest emotion  
we spend countless empty hours.  
You don't see my tears,  
not once have you felt my pain.  
Not once have you seen me,  
yet I see you more than anyone.

—Carrie Williams  
Chicago, Illinois

## Winesburg, Ohio Revisited

Sometimes night is our Sanhedrin  
false accusers talking in our sleep  
running us naked yet unnoticed  
in a crowd of lonely people  
their crush threatens to suffocate us

Pray not for dreams  
pray not for midnight ruminations  
when the mind's ear is open to accusations  
and the heart could be trampled by  
the gathering crowd's feet  
pray for sleep  
the sleep after which we awake  
and the crowd disperses  
leaving one straggler to look in our eyes  
and emphatically say "Good morning."

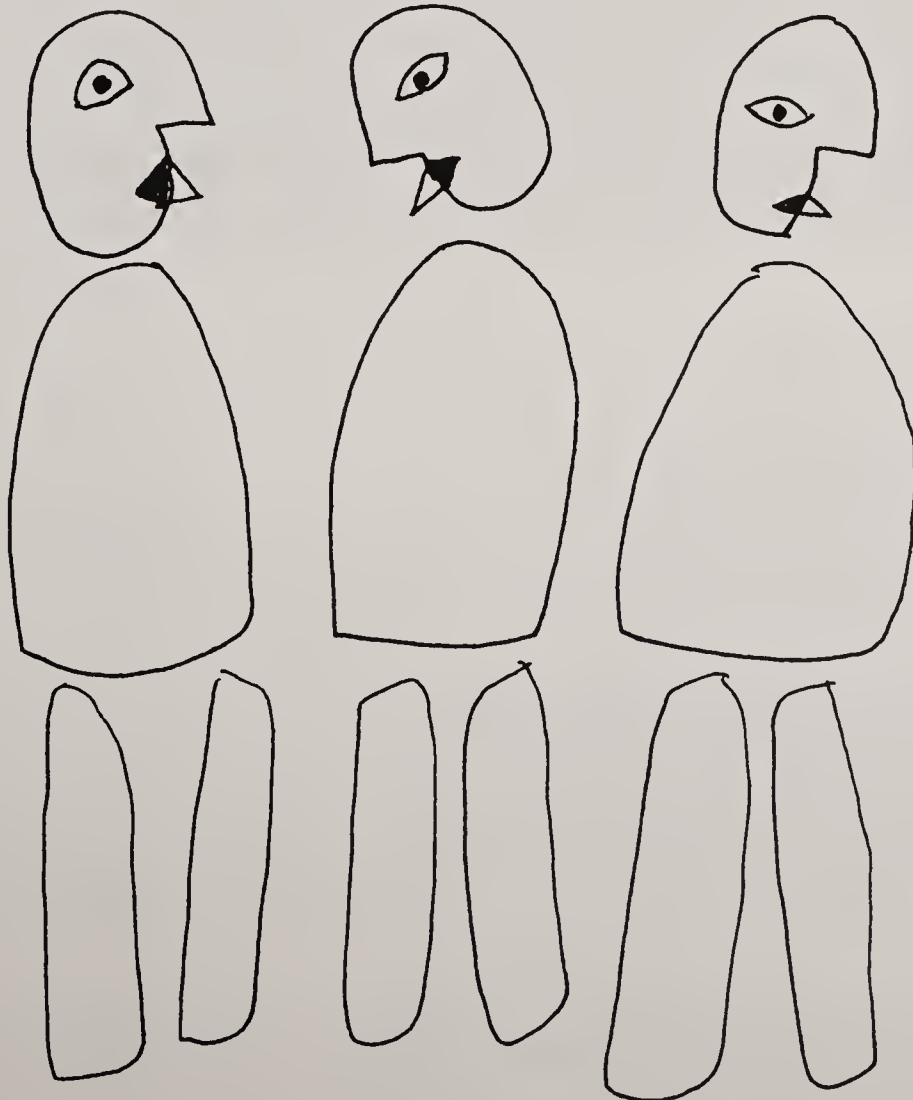
—Gordon Stamper  
Griffith, Indiana

## Rain on Snow

The metaphors are melting,  
Beauties we perceived  
Are sliding off  
Tree limb, roof top,  
Now irresistible  
To gravity's desire.  
The white sheet of the lawn  
Is sinking into gray holes  
Filled with yesterday's water.  
The bush is now just a bush,  
The fantasy land has become  
A black and white twilight zone.

Rain on snow,  
Maybe the winter is leaving  
For some a cause for rejoicing  
For others a sense of loss  
Of a world that at least  
Looked as if it was innocent.

—K. S. Hardy  
Bowling Green, Ohio



Illustrations by K. Carlton Johnson

## Crossing the Pond

Smooth black-lobed rocks  
Half buried  
The bending bodies of trees reaching down  
Sodden leaves clumped along the banks.

The still black water's  
Serious stare  
Back  
Like an empty open mouth.  
Cattails and marsh elders grow  
Among lily pads.  
Near the edge thick green scum pea soup  
Where bloated toads rasp air.

I crawl into the little boat  
And maneuver a position  
Leaning my body forward.  
The first stroke is confirmation.  
I meander like a fish  
Each stroke, a flex  
Of muscles, and movement  
Is joy.

Clusters of weeds  
Rank and sweet  
Water skaters crawl across the mirror of water  
While unconcerned  
Ancient dragonflies hang still in the air.

—Glen A. Perice  
*Seoul, Korea*

## And So She Stays

"I won't leave," she says.  
"I don't want to have to pinch pennies.  
Anyway, women live longest  
And I plan to collect his insurance,"  
And so she stays. . .

Stays through the loveless days and nights,  
Through the solitary loneliness of two people  
Separately occupying the same rooms,  
Through the realization that he doesn't like her  
Any better than she likes him,  
And still she stays. . .

Stays through the hundred thousand tears shed,  
And through the hundred thousand drops of blood  
That hemorrhaged from her artery  
Where the cancer ate.

—Nancy King  
*Jacksonville, North Carolina*

## Think Of

Think of an open field, freshly cut  
and green as indigo blue;  
think of wind across an amber creek  
where the catfish never bite and  
turtles rise like stepping stones;  
think of bare feet, Levi jeans, dirt roads,  
and cars red as wet cherries;  
think of hugs and back-seat scores,  
football jackets, and beer cans pitched  
at the worthless moon;  
think of Aunt Sara and Uncle John  
who scolded you and molded you  
and made you who you're not.

Think of a time long ago, easy as July honey,  
before the telephone calls and Fax replies,  
and where it was you meant to be  
and all those things you didn't do,

then ask yourself—  
what happened?

—Robert Carlton  
*Crestview, Florida*

## Conversations

The trees outside my window never speak  
They converse and release their thoughts by sign  
constant to change  
revisioning themselves with a powerful submission to time

Their lives repeat themselves  
through the violence of new green then  
the suicide of leaves blistered red  
bled out now  
crunched brown around the parent base

Like mine, like our own personal past  
Letting loose reluctantly

What can be seen in these phoenix lepers?  
An absence of artifice  
Everything discarded but nothing ever lost

Their severed trunks reveal fidelity  
Each season's story ringed around the last  
compressed and compacted  
fortifying what will come

But the trees stand like comfort now and seduce me with their  
fine reserve  
They hold their polished limbs aware  
and reach me better than they know.

—Debby McDonald  
*Ferguson, Kentucky*



# RAIN

by

*Henry Meyerson*



*Photo by Kingsley*

Is it raining, she asks?

What?

Is it raining?

I bend low to catch the sound. Her tongue slowly reaches out to moisten her whitened lips. I hold her hand and smooth her gray hair against the white pillow.

What?

Is it raining?

No, not today, I say. Are you expecting rain?

Only when you're here.

Peggy smiles at our shared joke, that it rains whenever I visit her here in the land beyond the Tallahassee River which could just as well be the Lethe. I come to this place often, if briefly, to visit and to evaluate, assess her health, her life, and usually the rain and I are joined here in a marriage of inconvenience. But not this day. So far, this

day, Charon holds the rains.

Have you. . . ?

What? I lean lower.

. . .made your travel arrangements?  
Gotten your boarding pass? To go back.

No, not yet, I say. I left it open. This time I'll stay for a while.

I don't usually stay awhile. I usually hit and run. In on Friday, out on Sunday, counting the hours on Saturday. Especially if it rains. I can't be convinced that when it rains in Florida the clocks don't move slower. Probably due to the humidity, I figure. Gums up the works.

But with this, she smiles and closes her eyes. A nurse comes to the door, then stands by the other bed, now empty, its previous occupant gone. They often leave this way. Not even a goodbye, it's been nice, let's keep in touch. Sometimes it is in the middle

of the night, as if these people have somewhere to go in the middle of the night. They're there when the lights go out at night, gone when the lights come on in the morning. The nurse motions for me to join her.

We're still not sure what happened.

But she fell. Two days ago she got out of bed in the morning and fell. She never falls. And look, she barely responds.

We look and she seems to shrink a little more before our eyes. Soon all that will remain will be her smile: Cheshire Peggy.

We still have no diagnosis, the nurse insists.

Well, I'm not trained in this stuff, but it sure seems like a coma to me.

Ssssh. She'll hear us.

She'll hear nothing, not without those things. I motion to the hearing aids laying on the table.



Still. . . she says as she leaves and I think, yeah, it certainly is.

The question I ask and which Peggy cannot answer is how did she manage to become a different person right before my eyes while I haven't changed a whit in forty-four years? Who painted her hair chalk white; who dimmed her sight; who took her hearing, who left her with arthritis, with cancer, and now with a stroke and in a coma? Who answers for this?

On my way to the cafeteria for dinner (even watchers have their hunger), hearing my heels resound on the shining green linoleum floor, it occurs to me that hospitals after visiting hours are frightening, nasty places.

At this early evening hour hospitals are serene and have a quiet efficiency as the night staff relieves the beleaguered day staff. Calm men mop and polish the floors. Large buxom women with melodious Haitian voices relay the cold, hard medical orders in a song that suggests comfort and life.

It's all wrong. It's a mirage. These women are Sirens and they offer the Lotus and soon we will all have white hair against a white pillow and smile unknowingly as hands pat our heads and then go to dinner. Better the tumult of the day when unseen bodies hidden in darkened rooms emit howls of pain, when disconnected voices blare the names of doctors and coolly announce code blue which does not describe the warmth of an azure sky, but, rather, the color of death. Better the banging and howling and running and wringing of hands and twisting of faces than this nighttime charade. At least during the day you know what the hell is happening. At least during the day the struggle is engaged. During the day people aren't swept away from their bed, surreptitiously made gone. Night in a hospital is vicious because we let our guard down, we allow ourselves to be vulnerable. I think we are like horses, responding to stroking and patting to calm us after a fright.

Are you here visiting someone?

Fifty tables in this sterile hospital cafeteria, two hundred chairs, all empty, yet it is the chair directly across from me, at my table, the old woman decides she wants and takes.

My mother, I say.

Ah, your mother. Yes, you can tell.

How?

Your face. It has a mother's son's look. You're here for her. Naturally. I'm here for me. I'm dying, you know.

Ah, sorry. I scan her face, but avoid her eyes, as I dig my fork into my salad. Mother's son's look, I think. What is that look? I'll find a mirror. It occurs to me I'm dealing with a crazy.

No need to apologize, she says. Not your fault, you know. I guess the living always feels guilty about the dead or dying. I know I do. I've always tried to avoid them, now I'm one of them. Hard to avoid myself, you know. I'm not sure yet how I feel about my situation, you know. It's so odd, this business of being in-between. I can handle being alive and then being dead, but it's the not quite, being midstream, that's so hard, you know. Being one or the other is livable, so to speak. It's this being in the middle that's so difficult. Don't you agree?

My processed ham and cheese on white bread has to wait as I think this through. Finally, I say, yes I guess I agree, that being in-between is difficult; I think being in the middle is difficult even if you're not dying, but when the issue is dying, it seems to me we are on a whole new level of problem.

I look out of the window as my new, dying friend is formulating her response. It has begun to rain. Charon. Fucking Charon. I hurriedly excuse myself and rush to return to the hospital room.

Give her my best.

I wave a goodbye over my shoulder.

It seems longer to return than when I left. I always thought it was supposed to be the opposite. The elevator takes its own sweet time.

The room is a right turn off the elevator and at the end of a long corridor, long enough to appear to narrow at the far end, but maybe I'm imagining that. I push hard down the corridor. Two aides in spanking clean white dresses pass me midway to the room. They seem somber. Our eyes meet, but they quickly look away. I walk faster. I'm nearly running.

Reaching the threshold to the room I see three nurses standing at the bed, their

backs to the door. One turns at my entrance. She stays, the others quickly leave, glancing at me from the corners of their eyes, their heads turned. It begins to rain harder now. I think of my father lying underground in New Jersey. Who will answer for this?

The remaining nurse lays a comforting hand on my arm and says Peggy had simply stopped breathing; that she had another stroke; that her last days, hours, minutes, seconds were blessed, that she felt no pain. I hear as an ox must hear when told to move: could you repeat that, please? I'm not sure I understand.

What would you like to do with the hearing aides?

I won't be needing them, I say. Donation?

Fine. I'll take care of it. And you can stay as long as you'd like tonight. Have you made arrangements?

I'll be going home tonight.

No, I mean about burial.

Ah, yes, no, I mean I haven't, but she did. She took care of everything. I'll call them. I have to sit down first. Okay if I stay a minute?

As long as you'd like. I'll be at the desk.

The nurse leaves and I sit. When my great-aunt Fanny died, my seventy-year-old great-uncle Herman disappeared. The family had no idea where he had gone. He remained this mystery relative, a joke among the family, that when the Messiah comes Herman will be driving the car. Then twenty years later, when, upon a visit to Fanny's grave, I found Herman lying beside her, his name carved in stone, I called my sister.

Ruth, call off the cops, I found Uncle Herman.

After calling my sister with the news about Peggy, I look for my friend from the hospital cafeteria. She's gone, too. I wonder if she had decided to move from the middle. It wasn't night, yet, but it was still raining.

*Henry Meyerson lives  
in New York, New York.*



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# Mother . . .

Your doctor tells me  
again and again

every time I call  
his voice a lemon tone of answers:

“She CAN return to her home.”  
Return, Mother, to your lace curtains

at the window, to the framed photos  
of children grand and not so grand.

Come home to your three-room palace:  
that shelter which is safe enough for now.

Why do you want to move from the hospital  
to a facility for the dying?

I know you remember  
great-grandmother died choking on her

vomit. You seeing the poison ooze  
past her teeth, open mouth.

She leaving thirteen children to cry blood tears.  
She showed you more than dying. She showed you how

to care for roses and yourself. “Wear a brimmed  
hat to shade your face, and garden gloves to protect

your fingers.” She guided you through each step in  
the making of corn chowder; that rich, creamy, robust



*Photo by Roberta Ann Barlow*

soup you've passed on to me with its warm milk, the  
broth of life all mothers give.

Mother. . . I watch you as you lie in this  
single bedroom, this counting chamber.

You don't belong here. Not yet.  
And yet, you pull the blanket to your chin

and count those who will cry  
feverish tears for you.

—Jean A. Kiser  
Waterford, Connecticut

## Icy, Jammed Windows

Crinkled with control,  
varnished by a lust  
to accrue greater accolades  
while avoiding blame. . .  
cresting over brimmed  
lids goes the charm,  
a candy cane to emote  
a twisted and curled  
friendliness and greed. . .  
there are few outlooks more winsome  
than the eyes  
of an executive.

—Ward Kelley  
Bartlett, Illinois



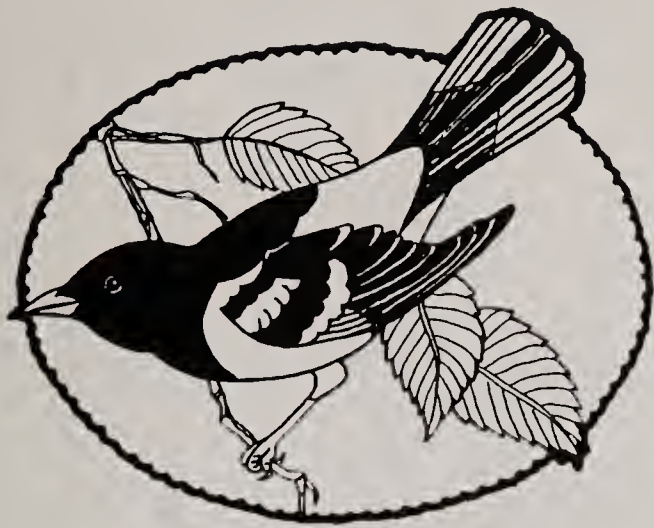
## For Butch

My sleepy old cat finds  
nothing better to do  
than stand at the back door  
peering in, searching  
for a place to nap away  
the afternoon, or retracing  
the path to his food bowl—  
the same dry crunches  
flavored in fish, chicken,  
liver—but never rodent  
or anything that might  
bleed when bitten, or scream  
high-pitched and dying  
to awaken those lost,  
dozing in jungle crevices  
or on sun-soaked plain  
that are reflected  
in the sliding glass door  
as it opens like a shiver  
through the hide of antelope  
and ignites tensed muscle,  
protracted claws, anticipation—  
the long tail ticking  
down to the saber-tooth  
a moment before coil and leap  
and the locked jaws on the jugular.

—Stephen R. Roberts  
Westfield, Indiana







### **Mystic Force**

Women have given up  
     the goddess in themselves  
 They deny the things that be  
     busy cherishing earthly wealth alone  
 Denying their divinity.

Let go of their force  
     seek the male-anointed roles  
 When inside themselves  
     the only source.

Do not nurture  
     do not care  
 Seek instead  
     more things to wear.

Goddess moon her face must hide  
     her mystic force does not abide.

Grasping, driving need for what  
     spirits in amazement stare  
 The loss of love  
     of peace, of care.

—Lois Gamble  
 Hammond, Indiana



### **Picking Peaches**

Climbing lightly like a cat  
 you reach through high delicate branches  
 for the most succulent  
 gently plucking.  
 The soft texture of fuzzy skin  
 and ruddy pulp slightly indent  
 with your touch.  
 Carefully gathering in your apron  
 bring down the treasure  
 to taste Elysian flavor  
 staining lips  
 the smell like golden moons  
 partaking of deliciousness,  
 cherish the gift.  
 You plant the seeds from peach hearts,  
 replenishing the orchard.

—Starfire Soledad  
 Louisville, Kentucky

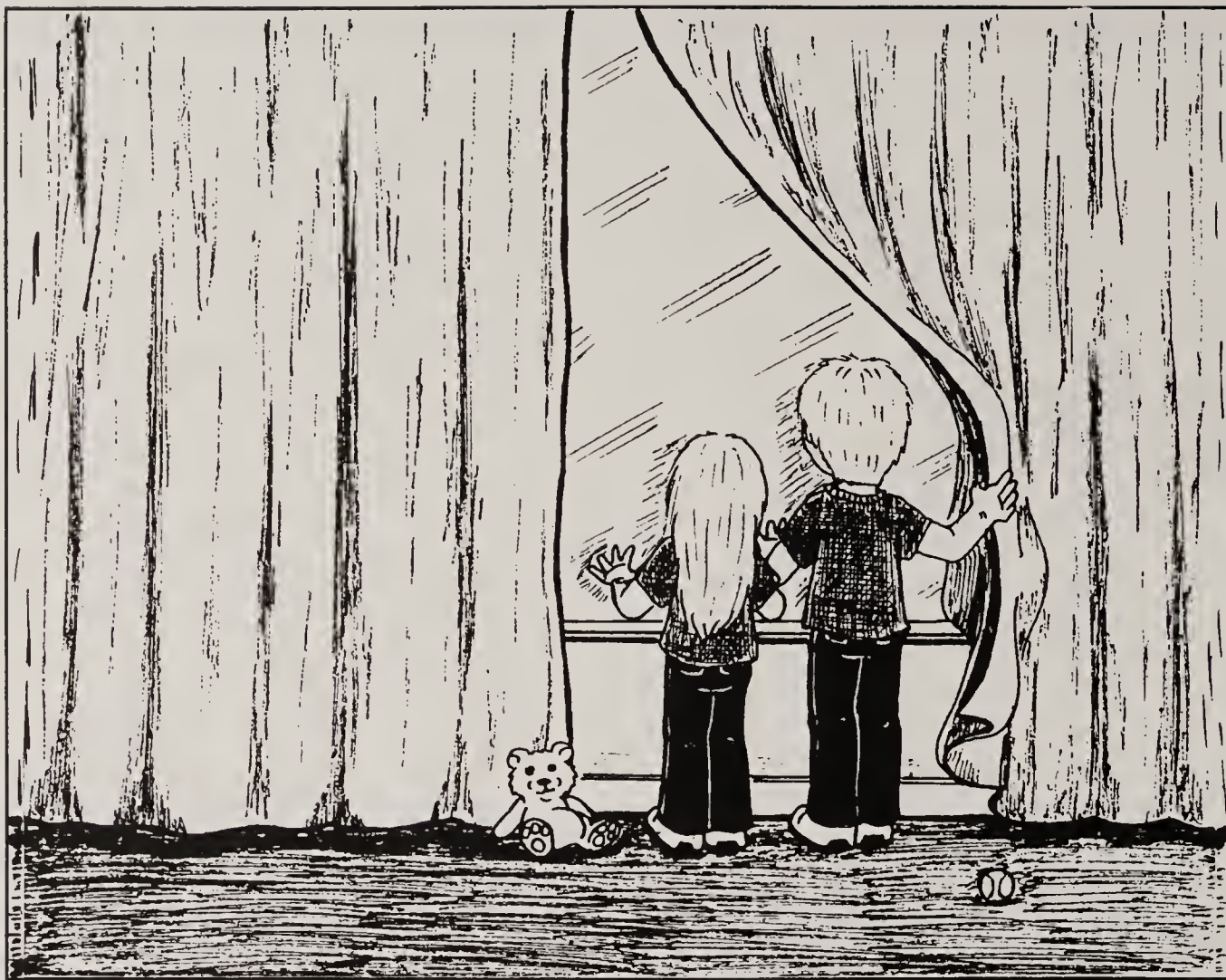


Illustration by Stacy Graan-Wilson

## A SHATTERED ILLUSION

by Patricia Wilson

A recent headline in my local newspaper's *People* column instantly caught my attention. It read, "King of Cowboys Home After Attack." My hero, Roy Rogers, had had a mild heart attack and had been released from the hospital after a short stay. After reading this article, my mind did a gigantic spiral back to a New Year's Eve—December 31, 1947, to be exact.

Memories have a way of snapping at you from out of nowhere. What happened that day was really not of monumental importance to others, but to a nine-year-old fan, it was earth-shattering. Just the opportunity of staying awake to listen to the New Year's Eve radio show was a thrill in itself. But before coverage of the celebration coming

from Times Square in New York City began, I was taken aback when I heard this preceding announcement: "The King of the Cowboys married earlier today." My mind went into shutdown, and I didn't hear all of the details. My hero! He married his co-star Dale Evans. No, I didn't hear what I thought I did. I couldn't have. Cowboys didn't get married. They just rode off into the sunset on their favorite steeds.

A few minutes later, my mother came into my room. "Lights out, dear." I couldn't believe it. I also missed hearing the New Year's Eve celebration. After I settled down to sleep, my mind would not let go of the thought that was keeping me awake—my hero was married.

Almost every Saturday, my friends and I would spend the afternoon at the Capitol

Theater on 119th Street in downtown Whiting. For less than 50 cents, we could see a full-length feature, cartoons, news headlines, and short features. And, of course, each week there was the "cliff hanging" episode of such adventurers as Flash Gordon and his arch enemy, the inscrutable Ming. We could have popcorn and a box of chocolate mints (my favorite treat) and even see the show twice in one day without paying again.

My favorite full-length films were those that featured cowboys like Tom Mix, Gene Autry, Lash La Rue, Gilbert Roland, and, of course, none other than Roy Rogers. I can remember one time when a sign board outside the theater announced a contest for the following Saturday. Prizes were promised for the best costume. Yep! I came dressed in



## Impermanence

### Hammond

Tiny fenced-rectangular back yards  
behind tiny sagging bungalows  
line the South Shore tracks  
through Hammond's garbage-can alleys  
barren, desolate in last week's dirty snow  
in nearly every one  
a children's iron-pipe gym-and-swing set  
green, red peppermint-candy-striped  
dulled with patina of steel dust  
blast furnace-refinery smoke

soft-sad-sweet child  
laughter, shouts, shrieks  
last summer's  
next summer's  
excitement  
life

—Gilbert Laue  
Edgewater, Indiana

A horse walks off a cliff into a dark evening.  
Hurricane spawned in the South Atlantic plants straw  
2" into cinderblocks in Barbados.  
A cow named *Matilda* straddles a yawning  
earthquake fault.

Whirlwinds beget.  
Cyclones: the wrath of a vengeful God?

The flight of vapor to solid:  
gaseous bubbles form 6,000 feet below  
the Pacific aggregate into an island.  
A worm walks into a cocoon  
and emerges with wings. . .

Once again the molten sun rises out of the horizon  
fragile and trembling,  
a miracle of perfection

and the newborn morning shines  
the color of eggshell  
offering flowers and smiles,

the picture of certainty.

—Peter Brett  
Ross, California

a pseudo-suede skirt, a fringed vest worn over a plaid shirt, and a cowboy hat with a red-and-white braided tie. I also had a set of silver guns in holsters. I didn't win. But the event was lots of fun because it featured a man who gave a wonderful demonstration of lariat twirling.

**A**s I think back on these memories, it is amazing how that era was such a time of innocence. Rogers would ride his horse, Trigger, sing and play his guitar (music played a major role in his films), chase the villains, shoot his gun a zillion times without running out of bullets, occasionally lose his white hat (yet have it back on again before the end of the movie), and never end up dirty, even in the middle of a fight segment.

Dale Evans, "Queen of the West," appeared with him for the first time in 1944 in the film *Cowboy and the Senorita*. Their combined career continued on to the television screen and enjoyed a new following of fans. Youngsters could be members of the Roy Rogers Riders' Club by agreeing to obey the following ten rules:

1. Be neat and clean.
2. Be courteous and polite.
3. Always obey your parents.
4. Protect the weak and help them.
5. Be brave but never take chances.
6. Study hard and learn all you can.
7. Be kind to animals and care for them.
8. Eat all your food and never waste any.
9. Love God and go to Sunday School regularly.

10. Always respect our flag and our country.

Now, fifty years later, I can still visualize Roy Rogers on the screen. The adventures and good deeds he performed in his films, on television, and in his personal life are what drew me and other youngsters to idolize him.

My hero continues to live in my mind and in my heart. I wish him continued good health and many more chivalrous rides down the trail. There is only one proper way to end this trip down memory lane: "Happy trails to you. . . until we meet again."

*Patricia Wilson lives  
in Hammond, Indiana.*

## From The Window

### (I See My Mother)

From the window I see her bend  
to the roses,  
movements tentative,  
sunlight fixing on her  
a halo.  
The quiet insistence of her fingers  
parting the soil in spoonfuls  
on a spade.

She'd be chagrined  
to know she bears  
no resemblance  
to Audrey Hepburn  
(the idol of her youth).  
She bends not  
with the stature  
of a calm day's willow,  
nor with doe eyes, topped  
with a brim wide enough  
for Eliza Doolittle.

Instead, she is curled  
like a snail.  
Back arched  
with accumulated pains  
of child rearing and  
spilled grape juice,  
headaches, slammed doors,  
and the ceaseless "Mommy!"s  
of our romper-room  
mansion.

Yet, even in a garden during  
a rain-blessed summer,  
she is an Oasis.  
And gladioli bend to inhale her wisdom,  
and lilies tilt their heads to  
her serenity:  
A sublime happiness  
only in being.

—Angela Edwards  
Suffolk, Virginia

## The Slide

From the top of the slide  
the playground was mine  
except that Johnny

at the bottom,  
laughed at me, jeering,  
"Come on, scaredy!"

I let go  
sliding fast  
to knock him down.

The worst happened  
slam whammy!  
into his arms.

The kiss, brand new,  
lasted  
awhile.

I was wearing  
my blue and white  
polka dot  
dress.

—Doris C. Baker  
Virginia Beach, Virginia







## Remembrances

Old ladies  
visiting cups and saucers  
on your quest for solace or romance,  
moonbeams are from  
selenious glances of teaspoons  
reflecting wintry vestments beneath hats  
of undistinguished lineage.  
Where are they now whom you loved so well?  
Do they remember the days of lavender and lipstick  
when they call, if ever?

In your strawberry years  
you had choices  
of horse and carriage or  
automobile and flat tires.  
You could choose your young swains  
with assurance of a recognized code  
written on hearts with the hand of an angel.  
They might have been hard years,  
but they had greater certainty  
in your daily walk.

—Henry White  
Crown Point, Indiana

## Milk Leg

LaVina Wadelle  
saw the most  
incredible things  
keeping house for us.  
Milk cartons  
flying through the air  
like stray missiles,  
fist holes  
through the doors,  
the telephone shattered  
like a plastic toy.  
She heard things, too.  
Wild accusations,  
fits and screaming  
and blistering arguments.  
Sometimes,  
she covered my ears  
with her hands.  
But I heard.

She wore the same  
cotton house dress  
day after day,  
smelled of Castile soap,  
had a big mole  
on her thumb  
and struggled to walk  
with her "milk leg."

She never said much  
and nobody asked her  
what she thought.  
She washed dishes,  
smiling to herself,  
and looked out the window  
when the house became  
unbearable.

She cleaned the daily debris  
of a miserable marriage  
and washed our clothes.

—Michael Gregg Michaud  
Los Angeles, California

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## THE BIRTHDAY CAKE

by Laura Ruben

Before trying a new recipe, it's always wise to read through to make sure you have all the ingredients. Before telling you my tale, I'll give you the cast of characters.

My daughter was on vacation, so I had her two large dogs and a cat. The mother dog, Lukie, is about the size of a German Shepherd. Her son, Gweedoo, is much, much larger. The cat seems to have a penchant for getting into trouble—a feisty little brat.

It was my grandson's ninth birthday. I bake and decorate a cake for each birthday. Last year, Bryan had asked for "Garfield" on his cake. I borrowed a comic book and drew (with frosting) a reasonable facsimile of the cat's face. Bryan was delighted.

This year, when I asked him what he wanted on his cake, the reply was "Calvin and Hobbs." I borrowed a book. More comic book characters! Oh! for the days when I could buy a little plastic "Superman" figure and decorate the cake.

Calvin is a little boy with spiked yellow hair, wearing a red and black striped shirt. Hobbs is a tall, skinny tiger with a long white belly, jowl whiskers and orange and black stripes. We're talking drawing stripes with frosting! Black is an impossible color to mix with food colors (red, blue, green and yellow), but I couldn't disappoint Bryan. I had to try.

I baked a nine-by-thirteen-inch cake so there would be room to draw—iced it white with frosting made from a half pound of butter and set it on the dining room table.

Back to the kitchen to get the decorating tools, mix the colors for my "work of art." Yellow for the hair, red for the shirt, red and yellow for the orange fur, and cocoa powder mixed with red and blue for a sort of black.

Back to the dining room with all my props—and there! on the table, the cat, helping herself to the butter frosting! Denuding a corner of the cake!

I yelled at the cat, cleaned up the cake and refrosted the corner. Now to draw. I took the book, set it up so I had the characters in front of me, and started. Face, eyes, mouth, outline the bodies. My warm hands melt the butter, so the frosting gets too soft in the metal decorating tube. I put a blob of yellow on Calvin's head and spike it with a toothpick.

Finally, the figures are drawn, the red and black stripes and the orange and black stripes colored in. I write "Happy Birthday, Bryan" in orange across the top. It is finished.

I set up a TV table next to my chair for the cake. Right by me. I can see the cake. That cat is not going to get it again!

I'm watching *Beethoven's Second*, a movie about a dog's high jinks. I heard a little yelp outside, and realized I'd left the dogs in the yard. Lukie was asking to get in. I ran to the back door and let them in, stopped in the bathroom and headed back to my movie.

Oh! No! There in the middle of my living room stood Gweedoo, that humongous dog. Licking frosting off one corner of the cake! And Bryan's party less than an hour away. No time to make another. No time for anything. Tears came into my eyes.

I screamed, "Gweedoo!" He skulked back to the kitchen. I checked the cake. Calvin had lost his feet, pants and the bottom of his shirt. The corner of the cake was bare. There was a small bite out of the corner. It would just have to do!

At the party, we cut away the barren corner and threw it out. The rest was delicious and the kids loved "Calvin and Hobbs"—at least, what was left of Calvin.

Wonder what Bryan will want on his cake next year.

*Laura Ruben lives  
in Hammond, Indiana.*



## The Tie

He loomed eternal in flannel but  
 was never soft, stank of  
 stale smoke, never soap.  
 We do not remember our father's lap  
 or even his eyes,  
 crouched low beneath bent caps  
 proclaiming best fertilizers.  
 We cannot recall anything  
 growing from him,  
 though of course we three did and  
 we all felt how it was,  
 filing timidly across the  
 linoleum those school-day mornings  
 hauling first logs then books,  
 his never giving a glance or  
 a hand or a damn.

Our mother's palms grew gritty, determined,  
 though disguised in the spongy dough of  
 so many years piled like the  
 smoothed rounds of batter set to  
 rise twice in pastel-rimmed crockery,  
 draped with a damp red dishrag that  
 danced in faded roosters, resolutely  
 festive on the grouchy radiators.  
 She steadily sprinkled the tops  
 with rough salt and served  
 solemn suppers, the only sound  
 the loaves, steaming.

Last March, doing the final things,  
 she placed a blue silk tie,  
 its price tag looped and crisp,  
 on the undertaker's subtle  
 credenza with the same ceremony,  
 believing there are just some things  
 we do despite our spite.

Autumn arrives, and the old steam spigots  
 lurch in the corners to hiss and grumble  
 their discontent, but we haven't had  
 salt bread in the house for months.  
 We dunk our biscuits  
 in honey.

—Rachel Contreni  
 Evanston, Illinois

## The Clock Is On The Mantle

The clock is on the mantle.  
 Summer ends,  
 the wicker chairs are quiet,  
 the radio remembers simple melodies.  
 Deer cross the road,  
 kittens dance in the wind,  
 red begonias dazzle in the sun  
 reminding me that summer. . . is over.  
 I hear a train whistle, wonder,  
 how do you remember me?  
 The clock is on the mantle,  
 firelight holds the glow of memory.  
 Life has had such beauty.

—Jane Stuart  
 Greenup, Kentucky





## Morning, Jackson Square

The fortune teller  
was up all last night  
with her blind lover

redecorating  
their cramped apartment;  
living room, kitchen,

eating spaghetti  
with bottled Ragu  
under the bare bulb

of a hanging light,  
then drinking instead  
of reading tea leaves.

Sitting arm and arm  
on the hump-backed couch,  
watching old love films

until test patterns  
turned into sunrise.  
Now, alone in weak

angles of sunlight,  
she squints at the Square,  
yawns at the morning

that forces itself  
on yesterday's rouge  
and worn mascara.

She struggles to look  
remotely alert  
and interested

in reading the fates  
of fools even more  
tiresome than her own.

—Richard Luftig  
Oxford, Ohio

## Lip Sticks

Canes for my lips.  
Lip Sticks.  
They support my invalid face.

Color me Red  
paint me a merciless smile  
I can go out in the chill  
my warrior's grin in place.

Color me Orange  
at odds with my complexion  
mating with a foolish shirt  
coordinated delightful brace.

Color me Purple  
a royal mistake  
greedy for amethyst  
my grin's a disgrace.

Color me Black  
I'm ready to die  
my ebony kiss urges  
Fate to embrace.

Canes for my lips.  
Lip Sticks.  
Drawn sword of feminine wiles  
keeps men at bay, so they say.  
My kisses are brands of desperation,  
logos of capitulation to the colorless truth.

Without Lip Stick  
I totter about, ugly in myself  
as lifeless as old snow  
nearly as frigid  
a cipher  
awaiting the benevolence of the Cosmetics God  
who will paint me an existence  
guaranteed not to smudge  
for a full twelve-hours.

—Diane Bogolub Petit  
Lansing, Illinois



## ... AND OTHER TALES

### FROM MY CHILDHOOD

by Virginia A. Deweese

**I**n 1946 I was a six-year-old, tow-headed kid in the first grade who thought she knew it all. My favorite things were jodhpurs, playing, the Rhodes Family, cakewalks, and getting into trouble—not necessarily in that order. And even though our family lived there for a short six months, Holcomb, Mississippi, was a special place for me because so many events happened in that bat-your-eyes-and-miss-it town that would touch my life for years to come.

My aunt, Thelma Ingram, whom we called “Sister” just as her brother and sisters did, owned a grocery store and “filling” station that faced the highway leading into Holcomb. Sister and her husband, Charles, got all the business because they were Holcomb’s *only* grocery store and service station. Our family, which included my mother and father, my brother, William, who was a year old, and me, moved from Batesville to Holcomb so Mother could help in the store.

Throughout the small towns of Tennessee, Arkansas, and Mississippi, the Rhodes Family put on country-western music and comedy shows. The Rhodes included Dusty, the lead singer and head of the band, a brother named Slim who co-wrote songs with Dusty, Speck, another brother and the comic of the group, and several other musicians and singers, plus wives of some of the members. Probably a lot of people have heard of Speck and his cornball humor since he appeared regularly on different shows on *The Nashville Network* well into the eighties. His plaid suits and polka-dot ties always made all the kids giggle, not to mention his “oversized” freckles, red hair, and missing front teeth. Speck would get on the stage and pretend to call Sadie, his girl friend, deliver-

ing one joke after another. More often than not, he laughed at each of them just as heartily as we did.

When the band got into Holcomb on a Saturday afternoon, all of the members would pile into Sister’s store and we’d have a visit. One of my fondest recollections is of Dusty picking me up and putting me on the wooden counter. Then he would play and sing while I danced. Of course, that was quite a few years and a whole lot less pounds ago.

As a matter of fact, twenty years later, our family went to my Aunt Barbara and Uncle Harry’s house warming in Raleigh, Tennessee, where those nights in Holcomb came vividly back to life. Harry had multiple sclerosis, and the new house had been built to facilitate his needs with built-in ramps, wider doorways for wheelchair clearance, and a trapeze to help him get in and out of bed more easily.

The disease didn’t show up in Harry until the late fifties when it slowly began to devastate his body, even though his mind remained alert. The doctors had a difficult time diagnosing his illness. When they finally reached the conclusion that it was MS, they were not surprised to learn that Harry had been stationed on Guam during World War II. The doctors told him that the mud on Guam was where he had contracted the disease and that he wasn’t the only American soldier who had to face this terrible illness. Apparently, bullets had not been the only danger “our guys” were exposed to when they had fought for liberty in foreign ports.

While we were there for the party, I walked up to Mother who was standing with several other people. She introduced me to (you’d better believe it) Dusty Rhodes. She said, “Dusty, this is Virginia, my daughter. The

one you used to pick up and put on the counter so she could dance.” Boy, was I embarrassed. Mr. Rhodes looked me up and down and I did the same to him. He was shorter and much smaller than I. I was positive he was thinking, “Wow! I did that?!” But he was very nice and said something suitably appropriate. I don’t remember what I said in response, but it was probably suitably brief and accompanied with red cheeks because at that stage in my life I was very shy and introverted.

Today, hidden away in my treasures is an 8 x 10 glossy of the band that is decorated with their signatures. Once in a while I run across it and reminisce about the fun we had. And now, it doesn’t matter whether my “older but obviously not wiser” meeting with Dusty Rhodes was embarrassing. It has become another memorable, and amusing, moment from my life that I wouldn’t change if I could.

Among the many highlights of the country music shows we attended in Holcomb were the cakewalks held toward the end of each program. The ladies from our community always baked the most delicious cakes (and pies) for these events. Of course, each kid knew exactly which dessert he or she wanted: Mrs. Peterson’s fresh coconut, Mrs. Adams’ double chocolate, or Widow Hemphill’s vanilla. Mother said I spent a lot of her pay at the weekly cakewalks—one quarter at a time. But the anticipation of being on the right number when the music stopped so I could win the coconut cake or Southern pecan pie was a thrill to me. Why were the cakewalks one of my favorite things when I was six years old? Remember, America had just gone through a number of years of rationing and I was just discovering what I’d missed until then.



Nearly every summer until I was fourteen and Mother and Daddy split up, our family traveled for a weekend to Water Valley, Mississippi, to “the little white church in the dale.” At least, that’s how I always thought of it. Those were the only times I remember my father actually participating in family activities, and no matter what we were doing he never raised his voice or ignored us as he would do any other time of the year. He became the father I’d always wanted and needed, and the bonds between us would begin to strengthen.

But, like this special weekend, this side of my father’s personality disappeared swiftly and, with a child’s impatience, I had to wait a full year to feel those fragile bonds again. However, once there in Water Valley, among family and friends, it was a homecoming that made us all feel blessed.

I think most of the population of Water Valley and the surrounding countryside went to that little church on a weekly basis so, when the out-of-towners got there, it was wall-to-wall people. The church’s doors were propped open wide as everyone wandered back and forth between the inside and the outside. Sometimes there was singing, and sometimes the preacher was sermonizing, while the painted cardboard fans were used to move the lazy, hot summer air. There were those who fanned themselves, along with at least three people on each side of them, with long, languid strokes. Selfishly, others fanned with short, sharp strokes, making sure that they would be the only ones to benefit. Children would try to steal the fans from their mothers and sisters because they liked the beautiful illustrations that graced them. The favorite illustration was a reproduction of the “Last Supper” done in vivid hues. Duels had almost been fought over the few of those we were lucky enough to get. Usually, what we ended up with was a fan sporting an advertisement for a car lot or for farm machinery.

The men, however, wouldn’t use fans—they preferred to use their hats or caps, if they were wearing them. Even in the hottest weather, they remained stoic, determined to bear it—heat, bugs, and all.

Each family brought enough food to feed at least two more families. I remember the long tables built from tree to tree. They were covered with a patchwork of tablecloths—everything from faded gingham to rose-

embroidered linen. Around noon, the food seemed to magically appear. Every child within twenty miles must have been present at that moment, there were so many of us. We walked the length of each table, discussing who brought what dish and what was offered last year and what was new this year. The older kids would pick up the little ones, just as though they were viewing a parade, so the youngsters could look over

and, once, a deer. The tables groaned, I’m sure, and I haven’t even mentioned the cakes and pies. It was a feast for the workers. You didn’t eat until you worked and, believe me, the adults knew who the slackers were.

My job was to pull up the sticky and prickly weeds that seemed to embed themselves under the edges of the tombstones. Sometimes, it was difficult to pull up the tough ones that had roots long enough to

Illustration by author



the bounty, too.

Great-aunt Minnie’s homemade biscuits were always winners! They rose like rolls and practically melted in the mouth. There were plates of sliced tomatoes, okra, squash, green beans, butter beans, peas, corn—creamed and on the cob—cornbread, potatoes fixed every way possible, bowls of gravy, and platters of meat including an out-of-season squirrel or two, frog legs, rabbit,

reach China via the North Pole. I hated this dirty, hot job, but this was one of the activities I shared with my father. He would tell me about the person buried in that particular plot and if that person had been related to us and how. When we were done, I felt proud. We had made the graves neat and tidy. The tombstones, cleaned and polished, reflected the jars of fresh flowers put in front of them. What a glorious final touch!



In the afternoon after the work and eating were done, we kids could play outside among the trees as long as we didn't go too far into the woods. We played Cowboys and Indians, Keep-Away, Hide-and-Seek, and London Bridge.

The one game I always lost at was Don't Get Poison Oak or Ivy. Invariably, even if I didn't go near the woods, I would end up smeared with calamine lotion from one end

ing at the same time! Besides the poison oak or ivy and the chiggers, there was heat rash, sand in your shorts if you went swimming in the river, getting caught by your brother's fishing hook, and other ouchies too numerous to name.

These yearly pilgrimages to Water Valley were filled with joy, friendship, and peace. However, after Mother and Daddy divorced, there were no trips to the little white church,

had no idea what she meant. Now, I remember some of those "adventures" and wonder how she kept from murdering me. Certainly, a jury would have let her off. Often, I used bad language: "Here comes my daddy like a bat-a-hell," whenever he came tearing through Holcomb in his car. Well, good gracious, I was only repeating what I'd heard time and again from the old codgers who would hang around the filling station and watch the comings and goings of the town's inhabitants. Mother scolded me, and the old men would laugh and talk about how "cute" I was.

I also abused my clothes. Almost every day when I got home from school, the sash of my dress would be hanging from one side only. When asked, I told Mother the wind blew it off. There were a couple of reasons for this answer: 1) Probably, one of my friends tore it off while we were playing on the flying jenny, chasing each other in a game of "It," or it got snagged on the fence while I was climbing; 2) I really didn't know how it had gotten torn off and thought that my excuse would at least keep my friends off the hook. I had no idea why she never believed me.

Actually, I was careless with my dresses because I wanted to wear my jodhpurs. Unfortunately, I only had one pair and, at the end of the day wearing them, they were pretty dirty. Back then, you couldn't throw clothes in the washing machine and dryer and be through with them in an hour. Water was heated in a big black kettle over a fire outside, and the clothes were washed by hand or with a rub-board. So, Mondays were wash days, Tuesdays were ironing days, etc., and my mother didn't have the time nor the energy to deviate from that scheduling unless it was an emergency. She had four mouths to feed (sometimes more if relatives were staying with us) with a wood burning stove for cooking, a job where she was on call much of the time, and a demanding but lazy husband. It was a number of years before I realized the kind of stress she had in her life.

But I wanted to wear the jodhpurs because then I could be like Elizabeth Taylor in *National Velvet*. I don't remember the first time I saw this star clad in jodhpurs and a neat button-down-the-front shirt, but from that day I had to have a pair of my own. Remembering my mother's handiness with needle and thread and pedal sewing machine, I figure my jodhpurs were proba-



to the other for at least a week after we got back from Water Valley. Since breaking out with a rash was always a given, Mother made sure we had the lotion on hand even before we left on the trip.

Chiggers loved me, too. Clear nail polish seemed to work the best on them. Mother and I spent a lot of time covering each little red dot with a drop of polish. There must have been at least a thousand spots, all itch-

no time spent with my "other" father, as I called him then. I still mourn the loss of that father, the one who knelt in the dirt beside me while we cleaned his grandparents' graves and who told me of their lives in the wilderness.

**D**uring my childhood and especially during our time spent in Holcomb, Mother often said I was hell-on-wheels. Then, I



bly one of her creations. However, you can't tell that from old photographs.

Later, I got a pair of brown, to-the-knee, pseudo-leather riding boots just like Liz's to wear with the jodhpurs. With my fair hair, blue eyes, and impish ways, I was nothing like the dark-haired, violet-eyed angel of the screen. But that was all right. In my mind, Elizabeth and I had a lot in common when I wore my copycat outfit. Probably, I was having a lot more fun just being a kid than she was being a star. As I got older and read about Liz's life and the making of movies, I wondered if she was ever really a kid who could do what my friends and I did. If not, she certainly missed out.

No matter what day or age, one warning every child gets is "Don't accept rides from strangers." One day, I did just that. Since I thought Mother would probably throw a fit if she found out about my accepting a ride from Mr. Lind, the father of one of my schoolmates, I had him drop me off down the road from the store. Cutting through a couple of yards, dodging clotheslines and beds of flowers, I managed to slide into the small space between the grocery store and the filling station. Guess what I found? A cigarette someone had thrown down. It was still lit and only half smoked. At first, I tried to ignore it and was able to talk myself out of picking it up. A few minutes later, the cigarette, a Lucky Strike, was between my lips. I was having my first taste of tobacco. Well, you know the old cliché: When she's bad, she's very, very bad. . .? Well, that seems to have related to me because smoking that cigarette made me feel ten feet tall while it scared me at the same time. I kept peeking out each end of the breezeway in case someone came by. However, I was looking the wrong way when my mother, who was going home for a minute, came by, glanced down between the buildings, and spotted me.

I was already crying by the time she reached me, her trip to the house forgotten. Of course, she asked her usual Mother's question: "What are you doing, Virginia Ann?" I blurted out, "I got a ride home with Beth's daddy. I'm sorry, Mama, I'm sorry."

**S**he didn't let up dragging me into the store, even though I dug my feet into the loose gravel and dirt, even though I clenched the corner of the store and eventually its door frame. I was no match for Mother. I knew I was in for the thrashing of my life.

I had done a super no-no but, you see, I thought I had gotten rid of the cigarette before Mother had seen it in my possession. Not so. That was why she was on a tear. To heck with riding home with Beth's father, to heck with getting home early and hiding. That was all small stuff. She had caught me smoking! And I would pay!

**S**he sat me on the counter right beside the cash register where everyone who came into the store was sure to see me. Tears ran down my face as though someone had turned on a spigot, but no one felt a bit sorry for me when they found out what my sin was. Oh, no, they asked Mother what she was going to do with her misbehaving (again) daughter. She said, "I haven't decided yet, but the punishment will fit the crime." To me, the punishment was sitting there blubbing all over myself for the whole world to laugh at and joke about.

True to her word, the punishment did fit the crime as she opened an entire pack of Camels and lit one. She handed it to me. Her only words were, "Smoke it." I knew better than to argue so I did what she said. Seven cigarettes later, my stomach was rolling and I was so dizzy I could hardly keep from falling off the counter. Mother said, "Keep smoking."

While I smoked half a pack of cigarettes, every person living in Holcomb and the surrounding farms must have come in to view the side show. There were winks, knee-slappings, laughter and, from a couple of my friends whose mothers brought them in to make an example of me, there were sympathetic looks.

When I went to school the next morning, some of the kids wouldn't have anything to do with me. I suppose they thought the "bad" would rub off on them and they would end up having to smoke a pack of cigarettes, too. My *true* friends, however, gathered around me to commiserate. They asked at least a thousand questions like, "Why did you smoke that cigarette to begin with?" or the real big one, "What does a cigarette really taste like?"

It did teach me something. I didn't touch another cigarette until I was twenty-four. I wish Mother could have done the same thing then that she'd done that long-ago day in Holcomb—believe me, it wouldn't have taken twenty-four years to quit.

When my father got called for a job at the

hosiery mill in Batesville, we moved back there. However, over the years, our family visited Holcomb on many occasions. At one time or another, I had two aunts and one uncle and their families living in and around the town, and the last store Sister and Charles ever owned was in Holcomb.

In the first few stores that they owned, the beans, peas, crackers, and pickles were either in bins or barrels. I remember scooping the dried beans into small paper sacks to weigh in the hanging scale for the customers. The crackers were ten for a nickel and loose in a bin. Pickles came in barrels at first and then in huge glass jars, requiring us to use a long-necked fork to pull a pickle individually from the jar. When there were just a few pickles left to fish out, it took as much skill using that fork as it took using teeth to bob for apples on Halloween. Cheese came in rounds which we sliced with a large, sharp butcher knife and wrapped in brown paper. I loved placing ten-cents worth of sharp cheddar onto a piece of heavy paper and then placing the whole thing on top of the pot-belly stove Sister used to heat the store during the fall and winter. The cheddar would just get runny enough to dip a soda cracker into. This often made a good meal on those long, cold days when I helped Mother at the store.

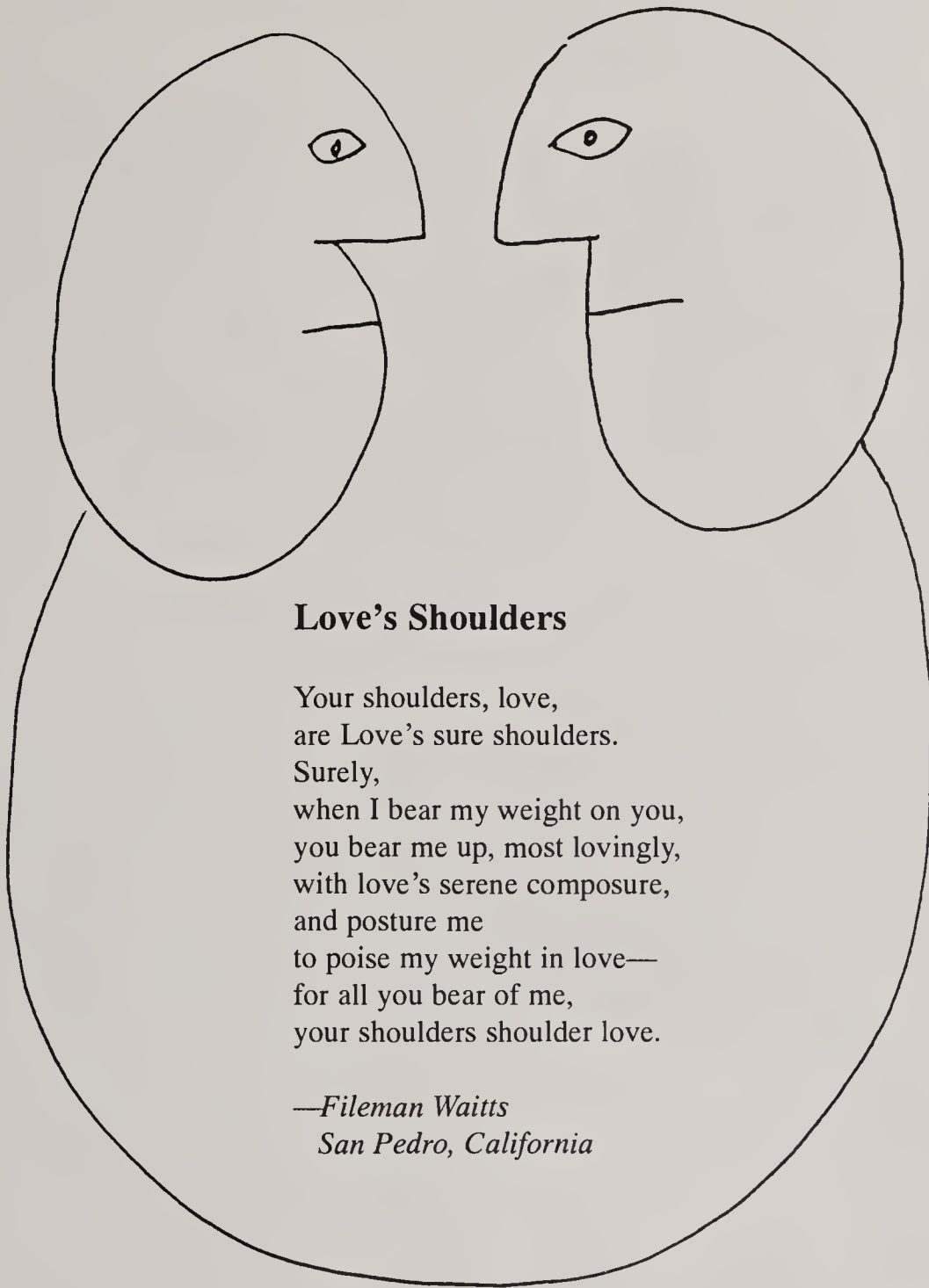
Even though these loose items were later sold either in cans or bags at subsequent stores owned by Sister and Charles, I enjoyed visiting all of their places of business because of the warm, home-like atmosphere each had.

By now, I'm sure you know that as a kid, I had a pretty sassy mouth on me. Thank goodness, I got better as time went on! However, I did want to leave you with one more tidbit from our life in Holcomb.

**M**other didn't like to drive. She did, but she didn't like it. When it came time to move our furniture, she often had to drive a truck loaded with household articles. My favorite place to back-seat drive a vehicle was from the middle of the seat, and I liked to stand up.

On one such occasion, Mother had borrowed a friend's truck and the rear end was loaded with a bed and dresser which still had the mirror attached. We were only moving across town so there was little sense in breaking everything down. My father told her to back up to the porch so they could





### Love's Shoulders

Your shoulders, love,  
are Love's sure shoulders.  
Surely,  
when I bear my weight on you,  
you bear me up, most lovingly,  
with love's serene composure,  
and posture me  
to poise my weight in love—  
for all you bear of me,  
your shoulders shoulder love.

—Fileman Waitts  
San Pedro, California

unload the furniture. Mother twisted and turned but, with only one mirror and me standing in the middle, she couldn't see very well. She said, "Virginia Ann, tell me when the back of the truck gets close to the porch."

I twisted around in the seat until I faced directly forward. I sighed as though I was thoroughly bored and said, "Gertie, just keep on backing up 'til you hear glass rattle."

To this day, I'm not sure if Mother wanted to choke me or laugh. But she did tell that story for years, especially whenever I asked her to help me watch for something while I was driving. She'd say, "Remember what you told me."

\* \* \*

In 1996, my husband, Hubert, our son, Brandon, my sister, Sandra, and I traveled to

Grenada, where I was born, to visit kinfolks on both sides of the family. When we got to our motel that Friday afternoon, there was a sign a few feet from the entrance which read, "Holcomb." It was less than a thirty-minute drive to get there. Because we were trying to see relatives from both sides of the family that weekend we were in Grenada, we didn't have the time to visit Holcomb. But we were told that it looks much like it did years ago. Some buildings have been replaced with newer ones; others have simply fallen down or have collapsed where they stood. The new homes being built are usually on the farms that had either been bought out by someone new, or the farmer had found a more profitable line of business. Still no discount stores in that Mississippi town. Not even a dime store! Just like I remembered it.

You know, until I saw that road sign, I

never realized how homesick I was to see Holcomb again and just drive through and look around, even though I knew I wouldn't be able to find Sister and Charles' old place or my Aunt Eva's home. Now, they're gone and so are those wonderful days of growing and learning. Some lessons were plenty difficult to learn, but each left an indelible mark on my life. I wouldn't say no to another chance to learn them all over again just to enjoy some of my favorite things and people once more!

*Virginia A. Deweese lives  
in Hammond, Indiana.*

## On My Last Go Around

Whole lives are here, this crumbling farm-house  
made more desperate for the colony of weeds  
that investigate its cracks, its emptiness.  
There's even a car in that ghost of a driveway,  
a Plymouth named for the rock. No pilgrims here.  
This is a graveyard of civilization,  
hopes held hostage to farm prices,  
roller-coaster weather,  
this crippled tombstone now no more than  
bald tires and body weeping with rust.  
My hands grip the remnants of a fence,  
hold it up that same moment those rotting posts  
try to pull me down, bury me in that  
overrun of grass, those wood-piles  
like dangling threads of family history,  
waiting for the final snip.  
But whole lives are here. Not everything  
will blow down with the next determined wind.  
I am in there somewhere, making the payments  
on forever with gun-shot voice and ruptured knees,  
wrestling each moment from the day,  
shrinking myself to fit inside it  
and then exploding outwards,  
smashing against all of its walls at once.  
That's the noise I hear,  
not the creaking of floorboards  
but the invention of life.  
My father's memory lights a cigarette in  
that broken window, coughing like laughter,  
the joke to be told to him by a stone-voiced  
doctor some time in the future, but now his  
rasping as rough and beautiful as loam,  
deeper than the wells he dug with  
those hands of Colossus.  
My mother's nervousness shudders the shutters  
as she steers a fragile story, through young minds,  
of death's brash meaning, abandonment,  
the cruel humor of the hinterland,  
the prospects of cities,  
their less-tangible horizons.

—John Grey  
*Providence, Rhode Island*

## Church People

I see them  
every Sunday, sitting  
in the front pews,  
perfect examples  
to the congregation.  
They are proud to be  
Christians. They say  
their prayers with precise  
enunciation. God can hear  
them better that way.

They are the pillars  
of the church—it would  
not be the same  
if they were gone.  
The preacher might be  
lonely without  
their singing  
loudly and slightly  
off key. They always have  
the freshest clothes and  
seem so intent on what  
he has to say.

You will find  
me in the back. It is  
cramped here—full of sleepy  
people just like me.  
From here I can see  
who slept in or who has  
a new outfit or tie.  
If the sermon gets  
boring, I can daydream  
and still look interested.

They say it will be crowded in  
hell, so perhaps this is  
a sign. But I feel at home here,  
and at the end  
of church, we'll be  
the first ones out.  
Still the problem remains:  
where are we going  
for breakfast?

—Linda McMillan  
*Valparaiso, Indiana*





*Illustration by Stacy Graan - Wilson*



## Moon Snail

Your shell, still faintly  
smelling of the sea,  
is a house perfectly  
designed, full of art  
and strength, those  
polished inner-spirals  
glistening, like a tiger's-eye  
stone or a mottled wet suit,  
with shapes so stark,  
so simple that Georgia  
O'Keeffe would have  
found nine poses for  
you in your natural  
earth tones, never  
mind the slap-dash  
colors of her dreams.  
The primal swirls  
of your broken outer surface

share that fundamental  
motion of Andromeda  
Galaxy and Hurricane  
Hugo, along with the  
kitchen sink. They are  
etched with a single-hair  
brush, accordion pleated  
like sand waves on the  
beach, well-melded sandstone,  
folds of mountains,  
layers pressed hard together,  
never to cleave again like slate.  
You are deadly to clams.  
You drill your holes with  
precision, and I thread  
ribbons through clamshells  
and hang them for some  
perverse purpose: a mobile,  
a Christmas ornament (how we  
like to synthesize creation,

domesticate our dangerous  
ignorances!) As an architect,  
you would be fine paid  
were this a human house.  
I have only seen  
you broken, cast aside,  
home without occupant.  
I would probably find you  
repulsive in your  
slick, amorphous nakedness.  
I treasure your unthinking  
skill as architect, as mason.  
Your true self has  
no currency here.  
I am not pleased  
to think how I value  
your outer show only.  
Now I own your shell.

—Carol Hamilton  
Midwest City, Oklahoma

## Gettysburg: 1938

The Model T backfires with cranking  
And an old, bearded, grey man starts:  
Involuntarily withdrawing from the sound

As if it were the voice of a rifle, across the way,  
Barking singly, singing a sound of winging death—  
To hear it first means life: the Minie ball is silent.

But it was the hack starting. No threat in that!  
Its motor roughly running at last, the driver motions  
And the old men clamber aboard, to go over there

Across the summer's verdant meadow where war  
Once exacted a terrible toll whose memories  
Still haunt the old, grey men whose joints jostle

As the bus takes them to the Copse of Trees  
Where Armistead, turning canons, died:  
Where Hancock held ground—and was hurt:

The old men approach the Line of Battle with eyes  
Dimmed by time and bodies broken, not by battle,  
But by long years of lucky life after the inferno,

And, straining to see, sight the tattered, holed Blue  
Blouses ahead! With also ancient wearers who look  
Curiously at the approaching van—and wait

To see if Johnny Reb wants to fight again. Or embrace.

—Steven C. Myers  
Columbia, Maryland

## Michigan City

cloud-making machines puff nimbus  
drift wind across  
the lake slow is obliging  
spread the Indiana shore with sore  
toes fatigued from sand scrunching,  
but they enjoy the search for beach glass  
brown green clear broken bottle intricacies,  
sharp edges smoothed by  
the dune wash tide.

the light tower  
pulls down the sun  
which warms Chicago  
with its red slender fingers;  
we wonder and wait,  
children walking among the warm  
arms of the sunset here,  
there.

—Mick Kennedy  
Toledo, Ohio



## LAST DANCE

by Sim Carter

Shannon squeezed some Lubriderm into her palm and took her father's foot with its familiar high and bony arch in her other hand. She felt its weight slip into place, her fingers curling comfortably around the misshapen toes, the lotion easing into the parchment-thin skin. He would love the cool shock of the liquid seeping in.

"Ahhh," he used to say, "such lovely, cool hands."

"Oh, great," she'd snorted but hadn't minded, not really, rubbing his feet for a bit in front of the TV. She'd been fascinated by the gnarled toes, the thick, curling nails. The feet of an old man. Nothing like her own, soft and callous-free, peeking out pettily from under a pair of frayed and faded jeans.

She hadn't known then that her own feet would not stay shapely and pink, toes topped with delicate little pearls for nails. Had barely noticed the layers upon layers of nail building up, becoming brittle little by little, cracking and peeling with the slow and steady course of time, yellowing with age. She hadn't known she would grow older, too.

She worked one foot and then the other, gently massaging until all the Lubriderm was distributed evenly and then pulling the sheet back down over them and with a final caress looked up to find her father's face. His eyes were still closed. She wasn't sure he'd felt a thing.

"There you go," she said with one last pat.

She thought his eyes squeezed more tightly shut for a moment, his mouth pulled more deeply inward for an instant. It was as close as she would get to an "Ahhh, such lovely cool hands."

He was going to die. She saw it in the ochre tint of his skin, the yellow hue spread by the diseased liver. She heard it in the gentle tones of the doctors, for once it seemed without condescension, and in the quiet movement of the orderlies and nurses. No jokes in Room 312, please—Mr. Simmons is on his deathbed. She saw it in the terror in her mother's eyes.

Her father was going to die and she was

giving him foot rubs. Sorry, Dad, for all those times I said no or went through the motions just to get it over with quickly or thought you were a pain in the ass and told you so. How many foot rubs could she do in penance? How long before the scent of Lubriderm no longer carried the smell of death?

Shannon smoothed the leftover lotion into her hands, soothing the rough edges of her large knuckles. At forty her fingers were already beginning to bend in bony mutiny, arthritis would be her father's legacy. Wiping her hands on some toilet paper—"Why weren't there tissues in his room?" she'd have to ask someone—she wished she believed in God. But what would that change? Her father was close to eighty. "He had a full life," she could hear them saying at the funeral. "It was his time."

She saw him half smiling out from an old photograph on her dresser that she'd had since she was a girl. It was a copy of a sepia-tone he'd sent to her mother during the war and right over the place where he'd signed the original he'd written, "To my dearest girl. Love always, Daddy." The skin of this distinguished British Intelligence officer, confidently wearing his perfectly-pressed uniform and a finely-drawn mustache, would still have been smooth to the touch.

"Mum, tell me again about how you and Daddy fell in love." It had been her favorite bedtime story, sweeter than any fairy tale.

"We met while he was back home in London on leave." Her mother would wait for Shannon to ask the question she always asked.

"Was he really as handsome as in the picture?"

"Even more. And so sophisticated. Remember, he was ten years older than I was. He'd seen the world. I was only twenty. Still a girl, really."

"But he didn't look old?" Shannon had hated the idea that he might not have been perfect.

"Older, but not old. Like in the picture."

"But even better."

"But even better, yes."

And so she began the familiar tale. Her

friend Trixie had warned her, "Stay away from that one. He's a right Playboy, he is," foreseeing her heart in shreds on love's battlefield. Her mother had resisted what she called his obvious charms by bringing uninited friends along on their dates. He countered by winning them over with perfectly-accented French and Italian, none of which they understood. So, he threw in some Arabic to tip the scales. When her father had returned to duty, he kept up the fight, sending back stockings and finely-made Italian shoes. In the end he'd been the victor and they'd ended up beautiful and happy like the couple on the cake. It was an image she would carry with her long after the age of bedtime stories had passed.

She saw him dancing with her mother on a rooftop in Istanbul, the starry sky their ceiling. Her father still young and dashing, her mother vibrant and glamorous in a filmy white party dress that floated and flirted with his tuxedo pants, the other guests a mere backdrop to their performance.

She saw him dancing at her own wedding—an early first marriage, one that didn't last. No longer young but still dashing. Shannon herself his partner that time, engulfed in white satin, captivated with the charm of his fox trot. Like every other woman in the room, Shannon would much rather have danced with Frank Simmons than with her own husband.

She saw him standing at the bottom of the stairs of that apartment in Toluca Lake. Seeing the place in April, she'd fallen in love with the bay window in the front, the same window that faced west and let in too much sweltering Valley sun in July, so she'd had to move again. He was leaning against the large white dresser she'd bought at the Salvation Army Thrift Shop, resting, just for a moment, he'd said. "Dad, maybe I should get one of the neighbors?" she'd offered but he'd insisted that between them, the two of them working together, they could do it. Could carry the enormous dresser up the stairs to her second-floor studio apartment. And they had done it even though she'd doubted her own strength and had





been petrified he would keel over with exhaustion. He'd been seventy-four-years old. "You really must get yourself settled in somewhere, Shannon. I can't go on doing this forever."

Shannon had lost count of how many times she'd moved, but each and every time he'd been there. Renting the truck, carrying boxes, leaning red-faced up against a counter for a rest, taking a huge drink of water. Making fun of her new neighbors but joking and flirting foolishly with the pretty young woman who always seemed to live next door.

The way he joked and flirted with the nurses just a few days ago.

"Nurse, will I be able to play the piano when I get out of here?"

Kimberly, fresh from nursing school, was eternally sweet. "Well, Mr. Simmons, I don't see why not. I mean, you know, if. . ."

Shannon and her father delivered the punch line together.

"That's funny. I never could before!"

There was the inevitable blushing and polite chuckle. "Oh, you. I can't believe I fell for that old thing."

"Well, if you really want to fall for an old thing. . ."

"Mr. Simmons!"

"Frank, give the girl a break," her mother warned her father with a smile, and said to

Kimberly, "He doesn't mean it, dear. Please don't take offense."

"Bloody hell, Sylvia! The girl knows I don't mean it. For Christ's sake. Shannon? Tell her."

"Keep me out of it, Daddy," she'd reply, as she looked out the window, avoiding both her parents' eyes.

"Frank. Please." Her mother was insistent. Her father gave up in disgust and the rest of poor Kimberly's duties were performed in awkward silence.

Of course, this was all before the disease reached out and shook him by the shoulders and for once he was the one who had to listen. You can't kid a kidder. He knew he was going to die. He never said the words but in quiet moments he approached the fact warily.

"Ron, your mother's hopeless." His mouth was so dry, the words caught against his lips. Her brother had to lean in closely to hear. "I can't tell her anything. You'll have to look after things, you know, when . . ."

"Don't worry, Dad." Ron jumped into the pause. "It'll be all right," and he'd pat his father's arm where it lay bruised and shrunk-en outside the sheet.

Shannon stayed silent and finished the sentence in her head. It was pounding from her being stuck in the stuffy little room,

breathing the same stale air over and over again. What she really wanted was a cigarette, except that her throat was aching, too. She watched while the bruises and liver spots blended together in a blur.

With her father's arm guiding, Shannon glided around a ballroom, his hand pressing gently into her back. They veered left, another press and now around, his arm both holding her firmly and propelling her forward. She didn't need to look at her feet, the floor, the room. Didn't need to know where they were going next, he would handle everything. She just had to glide and slide. Step and swing. Swirl and twirl. One and two and three and four and around and around and feel the music and her father's arms leading her along. The dance ended with Shannon arcing down into a graceful dip.

\* \* \*

He was cremated on Thursday. Ron had gone. "Someone from the family should go," he said, and so he had.

On Saturday they had a scattering of the ashes at sea. The day was brilliantly sunny, the ocean still and glassy where the boat sat moored and gently swaying. After the little basket holding the ashes and flowers was lowered into the water, Ron and her mother stood rocking in the center of the deck and together raised tiny cups of orange juice to her father's memory. From where she stood at the railing, Shannon could see when her mother's body began to quiver and how Ron, his hand stumbling down her back, patted her. "It's all right. It's all right. It's all right," she could almost hear his fingers say.

Her own hands frozen to the cold metal bar, Shannon wheeled away and watched while her father's remains floated free. Caught in the wake of the boat, the specks of ash and wilting petals were being tossed to and fro among the waves. All Shannon had to do was simply climb the rail and she could dive right into the dance. She could cut right in and go twirling and swirling around and around and one and two over the shimmering sea.

*Sim Carter lives in  
Los Angeles, California.*



## Gravity-Free Years

Hobbled by stress,  
a buzzing like a wasp's nest in her brain,  
she thinks she misses her college life of long ago.  
The casual intellectual smorgasbord  
where rich white kids  
dressed like beggars.

A time when she existed in a constant  
state of distraction and arousal.  
When her life was still filled  
with expectations and desire.  
She thinks she misses surrendering herself  
to forces beyond her control.

Gravity.  
Love.  
Roadtrips.  
All-night rap sessions.

When she and her friends in slouchy postures  
shared their stash and spouted feminist ideology.  
Their views on:

Abortion.  
Race.  
War.

But were doomed by the acts they had not yet  
committed.

She remembers how nice it felt being stoned  
and sleepy.  
Trusting and earnest to a fault—  
drinking wine from the same goblet with her  
first lover.

A furtive communion  
that later turned into  
private hysterics  
over a missed period.

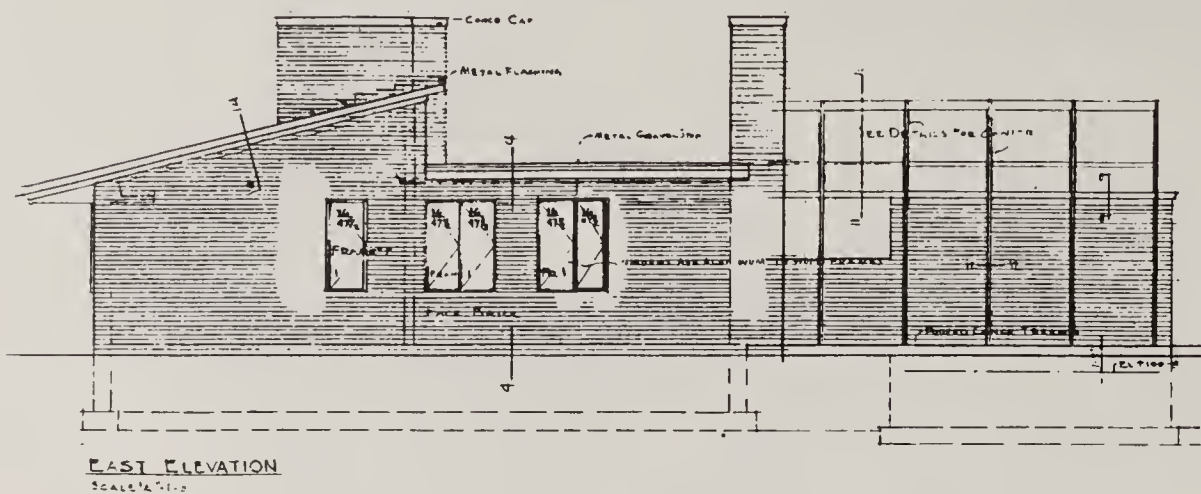
A night when the walls spun  
and the greasy seasick floor lurched  
and she discovered after waves of vomiting  
that Love is a sweet smelly sickness.  
Even now the queasy memory rises  
in her lavalier stomach.

She recalls the criminal feelings  
dull and sluggish  
the morning after  
as she conjured excuses  
to parents and paunchy profs  
for

dropping classes,  
dropping acid,  
dropping out.

—Nancy Ryan Keeling  
Cypress, Texas





## Safe

The moving company  
puts everything I own  
into four wooden crates.  
They tell me, your life  
will be safe  
inside.

Sometimes, at night,  
they move the crates around,

stacked three high.

—Duncan Saffir  
Lake Oswego, Oregon

## To Marilyn, On Her 29th Birthday

This love is deposited layer by  
Layer, the slow sift and settle  
Of experience hardened by pressure  
Of necessity, fired into durable  
Stone by flare of passion and slow  
Ovening of responsibilities shared  
Through drag and urgency of time.  
You can build on it like basalt,  
A floating foundation to withstand  
Tectonics of future shock  
Unshaken by onslaught of anger  
Or any Richter of wretchedness.

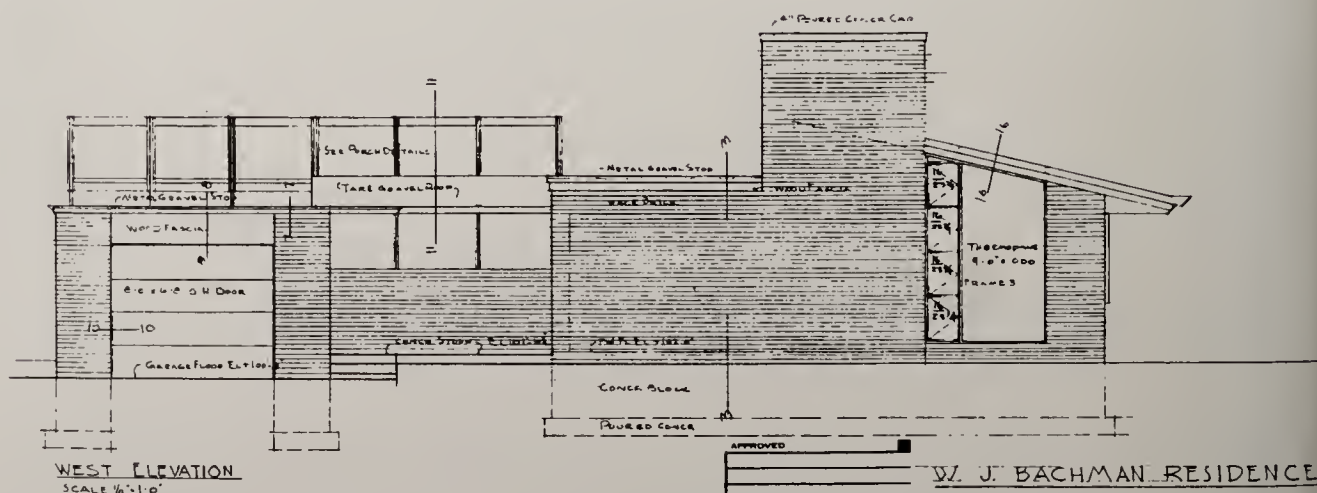
—David Lunde  
Forestville, New York

## White World

Windswept down produces drapery  
and valance in intricate design;  
cars top-notched with snow  
are ghosts bedded in deep slumber;  
oceans of crested foam submerge  
the contours, the grime, the landmarks  
of familiarity.

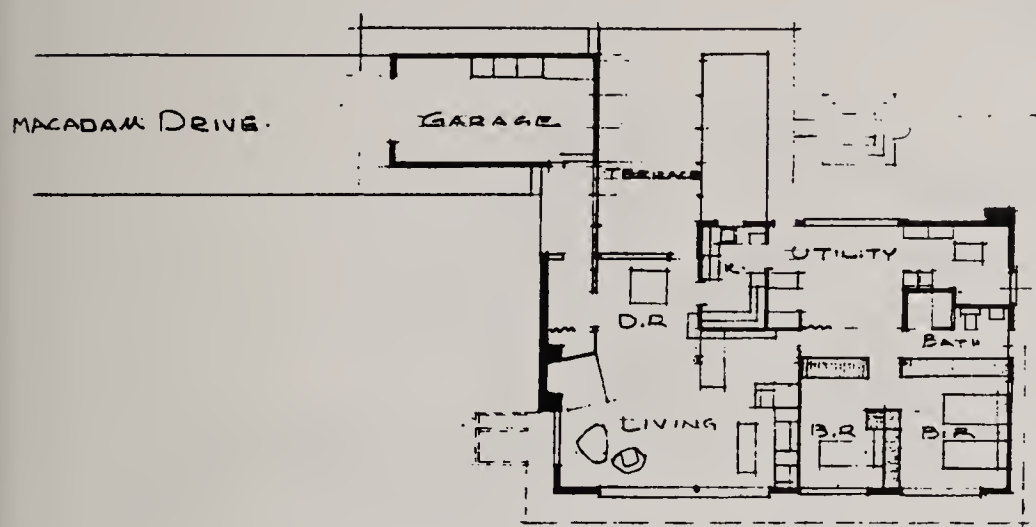
I sit . . .  
wrapped in my cocoon  
of one room comfort.

—Anna Louise Staub  
Rochester, New York



APPROVED		W. J. BACHMAN RESIDENCE	
		7111 STATE LINE AVE. HAMMOND, INDIANA	
BACHMAN & BERTRAM	ARCHITECTS & ENGINEERS	REVISIONS	
8116 MOHMAN AVENUE	HAMMOND, INDIANA	10-51-54	
DATE 9-1-48	COMM. NO.		





## Limitations

cityscape of squared edges  
buildings of all shapes  
always right-angled  
colors permitted to tint  
from street to street  
regular pavements run  
even streets meet  
orderly alleys

Perhaps a murder  
in that dark-windowed room  
a priceless canvas  
behind that thick door.

In that highrise  
a reader leaves his life  
floats on his music  
steps into the tapestry  
on the wall.

We must constantly confront  
so much measured space  
and well-lit cubes.

Even in this penthouse  
where I view four directions  
the building seems to wobble  
to pitch me into endlessness

endless  
as a tract of trees on a hill  
suggesting adventure beyond  
space to create  
all possible things.

But here  
only one patch of wild grass  
grows from a chimney pot.

—Ray Greenblatt  
Paoli, Pennsylvania

## Loop Crossings

The hosiery shops are gone,  
but popcorn places have flourished,  
and some magazine shacks remain—

I see you wending your way past one now,  
you in step with 35-year-olds,  
your briefcase 50 years fuller than theirs,

mellow, pliant, ready  
for more motion calls and depositions.  
At 85, you walk straight and sure,

as if elevators in the Pittsfield Building,  
their operators sitting on stools,  
had happened only yesterday;

as if your little girl still needed comfort  
from the long ride down,  
her stomach not yet at ground level;

as if those filigree doors  
had lent you their solidity,  
you who have aged

with the same elegance and grace.  
You are City-strong, Dad,  
as if the monumental Monadnock

had lent you the vitality  
to ride the train every day,  
to open your office door

alongside your son and his;  
you, whose big smile and hug for me  
as we meet for lunch

still serve as a buffer  
against the screeching 'L',  
narrow driving lanes,

swerving cabs and bike messengers;  
you, who still offer your arm to me  
when we cross the street.

—Sandra Goldsmith  
Chicago, Illinois

## My Son Gets to Know Me

I cast off from the shore.  
Canoe.  
The water's calm  
reflects the vast wilderness sky.  
Underneath muskelunge and mare's tails  
live unseen, trailing  
currents as if in limbo.

Already the dock grows smaller.  
I envy the white pelicans  
gliding to land behind the green islands.  
But I have the stars at night.

My cabin door slams.  
My son carries a fishing pole.  
His rhythm makes the bobber circle  
the pole like a red moon.

He has everything he needs  
to fish for the rest of his life  
and waves to me,  
as I drift farther out,  
my feet up,  
the air rich in the smell of pines,

until dark-blue evening,  
and he greets me returning,  
smiling and curious  
my stringer empty,  
yet I'm happy and gaze  
at the round of evening stars,  
the dark water fertile with my loss.

—Robert P. Cooke  
Highland, Indiana



## for Aldegunda (in memoriam)

you lived  
between silences,  
you lived  
in a quiet so profound  
not even the wind  
could know  
your name

you were  
like blown leaf  
tumbling down  
a village road,  
like butterfly dance  
in a field of summer sun—  
and you were  
a keeper  
of stray stars

now that you have gone,  
I find you everywhere—  
I hear the whisper  
of your voice,  
the singing  
of your spirit,  
through all the silences  
of time

—Charles B. Tinkham  
Hammond, Indiana

## Reruns in the Delta

Mile after mile of weedless green  
approaches ripening in the delta.  
Rice and soybeans wade to river's edge  
where an August sun bears down.  
Here, mockingbirds are at peace.

Dragonflies scour the winding course  
of irrigation ditches  
that create mosaics of endless fields.  
Driven inland by the heat,  
these paper-winged fliers  
compete with crop dusters  
for aerial honors.

The scene is the same  
for countless miles,  
and there is no admission charge.  
I reverse my course  
from time to time  
to enjoy an instant replay  
in the delta.

—Harding Stedler  
Cabot, Arkansas





## Coming Back

Coming back to the Cafe  
Gijón in Madrid and finding  
the name changed, like what  
was the name of the place in  
New York, yeah, Suerkin's,  
where Harry Smith and I and  
the guys from *The Smith* would  
go for lunch every day,  
and some asshole bought it and it  
went out of business in a year, I  
remember the old nineteenth-century  
urinals full of black cracks, Smith  
just had a hip replacement two weeks  
ago, Menke Katz, dead, Sidney Bernard. .

it's like looking for my old friend Miguel  
Cervantes and finding him in bronze  
above a statue of Don Quixote and  
Sancho  
Panza, at the back side of the Plaza  
de España.\*

\*There is a hidden literary allusion here to Francisco  
Umbral's *La Noche Que Llegue al Café Gijon/The  
Night I Arrived at the Cafe Gijon*, where he met all  
the great writers of Madrid, beginning back in the  
seventies—H. Fox.

—Hugh Fox  
East Lansing, Michigan

## With Deepening Breath

With deepening breath I pass into  
this mosaic bloom of fallen leaves  
rovings in  
russet  
yellowed green  
blood-orange vibrancy

Above my head  
grey furrowed branches frame  
necklace strands of Canadas,  
wings light before the storm  
down-rimmed eyes  
fixed starward in migration

The sear of cicada, so long dormant,  
is echoed now by the brown rasp of late oak  
each deep lobed leaf huddled tight  
fearful of separation  
in the pluck of frost and freeze

And here, in the sharp cider breeze of an abandoned orchard  
the pause of soft hooves and spotted backs  
is overtaken by the rattle of pitch-darkened antlers  
the fleeting flick of bright tails  
slipping quiet at approach

Captivated, I discard the creative  
content to simply be

—William Jeruski  
Saginaw, Michigan



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GORDON STAMPER

**The Day My Older Brother**

**Was Thrown**

**Out Of The House**

It happens in a lot of families, even the best.  
Conflicts take place, even in ours.

He was the oldest, and a lot of us looked up to him.  
I have to admit it, so did I, in a lot of ways.  
You would understand if you've ever met him.  
Perhaps you already have.

You might recognize the type in your family.  
He would be the one who always had the best grades,  
was the football quarterback, had the prettiest girlfriend.  
Everybody considered him the best-looking boy in the family.  
Anyone who would ever meet him would instantly like him.  
Even if you only met him for a minute.  
He was the one who was perfect in every respect. Perfect.

Hell (no pun intended),  
Father always did groom us to be the best we could be,  
model sons.

Maybe that was the problem.  
Father had high expectations for all of us.  
The highest for our oldest brother.  
When that type of pressure occurs, especially in our family,  
there are only two things you can do:  
Fly or Fall.

So Dad and our older brother clashed, one thing led to another,  
and next thing, big brother is out of the house for good.  
With him also went some of the other brothers.

I miss him sometimes and I often think about him.  
Wondering if his thoughts are on the brothers he left behind,  
about the home in the sky he was forced to leave.

So here I am, pondering the past.  
Not having the strength big brother did.  
I'll never fall,  
I'll never even attempt to jump.  
So I nod to no one, flap my wings and soar.  
Not as angel of the Elysian Fields,  
but scared child not wanting to anger my Father.

—Vince Ortega  
East Chicago, Indiana

**I Know How The Monarch Feels**

Leaf-shadow birth,  
odd creatures that grab, bite, sting.  
Hunger stalks;  
I would put the green world in my mouth.

Dark enfolds me, crushing, hot.  
Strange energy pulses,  
a shuddering,  
opening—

And I rise,  
far above webs, snapping jaws.  
Color smiles call, bobbing on spindly legs.  
A feast.

Still, hunger throbs  
as sun yields to frost moon,  
and color smiles droop waving hands.  
Go.

Vague yearning  
propels me toward clouds  
that spit dark stinging drops.

Others are gathering, searching:  
wingstorm of tattered selves  
lurching past wind's long arm.

Tree of burning light.  
I fold spent wings inward.  
The hunger stills inside.

—Kathy Kennedy Tapp  
Janesville, Wisconsin

## TIES THAT BIND

by Shirley Davis

**T**essie senses Paul is spying again. Her eyes zero in on the window, and there he is. His pale face no longer startles her as it had when he first started his daily visits. She even allows herself a moment of reflection on the way people reveal themselves upon entering a house. There were the knockers, folks who respected boundaries; the yoo-hooers, who took liberties based on presumed intimacies; and the peepers like her son Paul, who peered into any available window to assess what dangers they were likely to encounter.

She knows she should be grateful that she has a son who cares how she is getting on, but she damn well feels spied upon. She is not ready for a caretaker, not by a long shot. Seventy might sound ancient to a son on the sunny side of forty, but she is managing very well, thank you.

She considers making an obscene gesture like giving him the finger, but quickly berates herself for such an unmotherly thought. She has to smile, though, to imagine his reaction. No doubt it would scare the pants off him, thinking his mother had totally lost it. Paul had always been a bit on the timid side, unlike his sister, Sarah. She was the one who had come home with the bruises and broken bones. Still, he is a sweet boy, and he is here while Sarah is halfway around the world digging up ancient bones.

When she had shared her irritation at Paul's peeping with her friend Homer, he had offered to put up shutters. Knowing she would never close them, she'd refused. It is too important to catch every last shred of light from the time the sun rises out of the creek until it sinks behind the now black skeletoned trees. Living off the road, as she does, surrounded by scrub pines and black locusts, the only peepers before Paul had been the squirrels and jays reminding her it was time for their daily feast.

Paul never knows what he will see from his solitary perch. His mother seems deep in conversation, moving her hands in the way that she does to emphasize her words. To what ghosts does she speak? The room is



empty. He had urged her to get out more, emphasized the need to be with people. He had promised to drive her whenever he could after the family car had been sold because Tessie's glaucoma made driving dangerous. He had reminded her there was also that little bus that ran people over to the Senior Center. But his mother would have none of it, claiming the birds were better company than anyone she'd encountered at the Center.



Paul sees that Jed, the family retriever, has spotted him and is beginning to shimmy across the floor, his way of greeting family and friends. If a stranger had been on the porch, Jed would have been yelping up a storm. This thought comforts Paul, who is not at all happy about his mother's decision to stay alone in the isolated cottage. Homer, the nearest neighbor and a bit of a recluse, doesn't even have a telephone. Paul had urged her to come and live with him and Estelle. Though his wife hadn't been too enthusiastic about the idea, she had allowed it was the thing to do.



Paul decides he had better go in before Jed starts jumping on the door. Besides, there is little he can see over the pile of dishes in front of the window. What is that all about? He sighs and pushes hard on the sticky door. He would have knocked, but Tessie never seems to hear him. He is afraid she is becoming deaf, or worse yet, he sometimes suspects she just pretends not to hear.

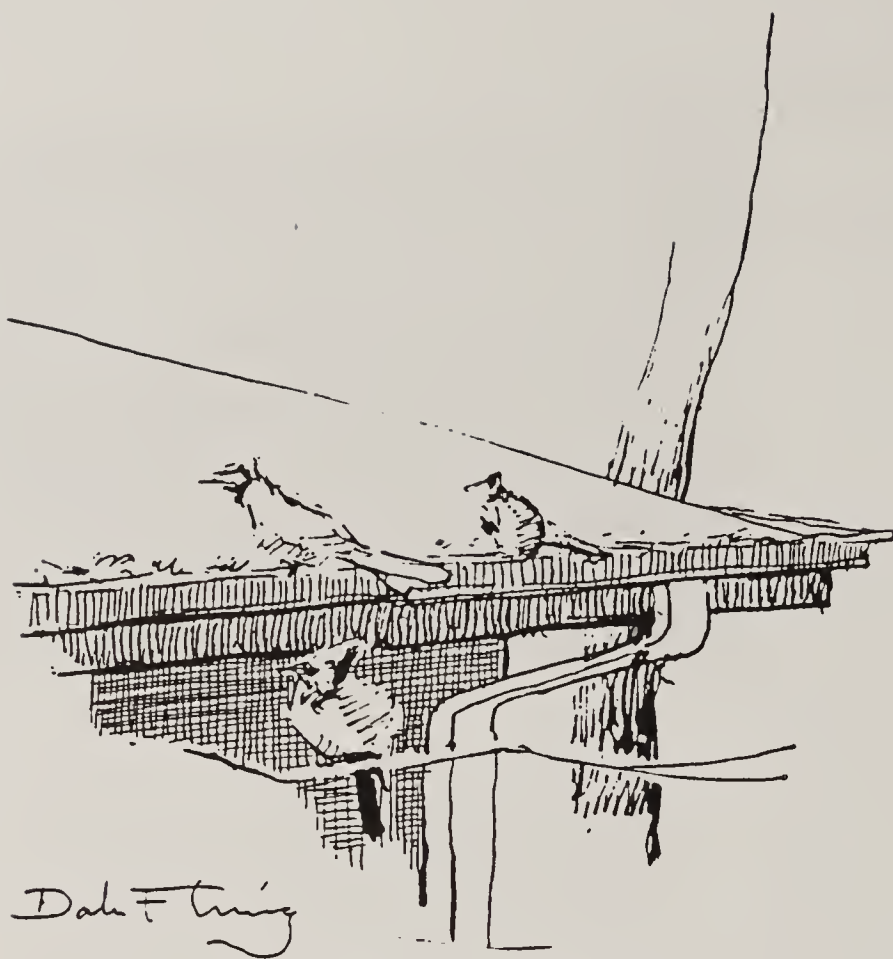
Tessie is pretending now not to notice Paul's entrance. The kid has no respect for privacy—never had. That's why they'd put the hook on the bedroom door back when the children were small. Harlan had told them it was to keep out the cat. How else do you explain to an eight-year-old and a six-year-old that there are times when three or four in a bed is too many. That is, unless you're into kinky sex, which lord knows Harlan was not. Now, there's no need for the hook, but she likes it there—a medal for past performance.



If Harlan's death has taught her anything, it is the value of time. Everyone has an allotted amount. The trouble is you never know when yours is about to run out. Even as a child, Tessie had found that frustrating. She had always wanted to know exactly how long she could stay in swimming or how many cookies she would be allowed to eat. Even now she wants to know when she is eating the last piece of candy in the box, metaphorically speaking. Tessie finds she is giving such matters as time and choice a great deal of thought. Before Paul's arrival, her mind had taken a "what-if" turn. What if she had taken the job at the radio station instead of marrying Harlan and the children's program had evolved into interviews, and she had beaten Barbara Walters to the punch? Sometimes, these reveries end up in her journal, but at the moment of Paul's arrival, she has been conducting an interview with May Sarton, one of her favorite writers. That May Sarton is dead does not concern Tessie. Didn't she talk to Harlan every day and hadn't he been dead for over a year? True, she isn't always aware whether she is just thinking or speaking aloud. Such lines are irrelevant when living alone. Heaven knows the market is full of men and women talking to rows of cans. Just yesterday a fellow basket-pusher, with a loud "Ha," accused a can of beans of hiding behind the corn. Tessie believes that vegetable and mineral alike respond to human communication. Certainly her plants do.

Paul stands in the middle of the great open room, which is kitchen, dining, and living room. He clears his throat, not to get her attention, but as that is his habitual way of checking out his vocal chords





before speaking. Paul's eyes dart to the pile of dishes at the sink, the magazines and books strewn about the room, the jungle of plants both dead and alive. The place had never looked like this when Dad was alive. He forces a smile. "Good afternoon, Mother. How was your day?"

His greeting reminds Tessie of the way the aides speak to the patients down at the nursing home where she goes to visit her friend. She takes umbrage with such condescension but, feeling she cannot share her real thoughts, considers appropriate responses. Time being too precious to waste on traditional claptrap, she says, "It was a hell of a day, Paul. The sun came up on the wrong side of the house; there was a nuclear explosion in the plumbing, and Homer came by speaking nothing but Russian." Whatever she says, she knows Paul will hear, "Just fine, Paul," so she feels relieved of all responsibility.

Paul, however, picks up on the mention of Homer.

"I'm glad to hear that Homer stops by, Mother. Have you asked him to fix that loose board on the porch? Someone could take a nasty fall."

"Homer comes by to have a chat. He'll fix the board when he's a mind to."

Paul does not hear her. His attention had turned to the pile of dishes by the sink. Tessie sighs. Now, she will be forced to explain her new time-space system. She had been amazed to discover that the house was

shrinking. Though it had sprouted an arm here and a leg there the way New England houses do, its veins and arteries were now clogged with history turned concrete: cribs filled with tattered receiving blankets, ragged stuffed animals, bureaus crammed with old clothing, sepia photographs in rusting frames.

Paul had not waited for an explanation. He had taken off his jacket, rolled up his sleeves, and was about to attack the pile of dirty dishes.

Tessie puts a restraining hand on his arm. "They're not ready yet, Paul."

"They look dirty to me."

"It's my new system. The clean dishes are to the left of the sink; the dirty dishes are on the right. When all the dishes are on the right, I know it's time to wash them and put them back on the left. The system saves time, water, detergent and leaves all these wonderful cupboards available for more important things."

Paul is depressed by this bit of wild thinking, or at least that's why he thinks he's depressed. Actually, Paul has always felt at the dim edge of his mother's attention. His father had been front and center, and then there was Sarah, the little sister with the curl in the middle of her forehead. She could be very, very good like graduating summa cum laude from Harvard, or she could be very, very bad like when she ran off to sing with a rock group that had come through town. Either way, she got Tessie's attention. Paul

might as well have been wallpaper. He had often thought if he and Estelle were to have a child, make Tessie a grandmother. . . Sarah had never done that.

**T**essie looks at Paul's slight frame, shoulders slumped, head down looking at the dirty dishes. His lack of spirit breaks her heart. She thinks of herself as a nurturer, but somehow she has failed her son. What can she do to set him free? She has never been a fan of Estelle's, but Tessie has to admit that she and Paul make a good team, both hard-working, methodical, caring. Good people. Or is she just thinking of herself? Her need to separate from old concerns and move into this final phase of life, free to accept the sometimes joyful, sometimes painful transition from flesh to spirit. She knows she must do this alone and that she must do it now.

Paul turns and she senses he is about to ask her once again to sell the house and live with him and Estelle. Didn't he understand that she is as rooted here as was the big cedar by the porch? She takes command. "I appreciate your stopping by, Paul. Now, go home and tend your own garden."

"I don't have a garden, Mother."

"I speak figuratively, my dear. Go home to your wife; make some babies," she says in desperation.

Paul brightens. "Would you like that, Mother? Would you like to be a grandmother?"

"Only if it fits your plans, Paul."

"Well, yes, of course. If you're sure there's nothing you need, I'll be by tomorrow." Paul air-brushes her cheek and with one last despairing shrug, he leaves.

In the car waiting for the engine to warm before starting down the rutted drive, the errands he had planned to do on the way home forgotten, he sits fixated with his mother's last words, "make babies." The juxtaposition of his own thoughts and hers startles him. As a science teacher, he does not believe in the transference of ideas without language. He wishes himself back in the lab with its orderly row of glass containers, its predictable smells of sulphur and ammonia, its predictable procedures. There, he is in charge even though he senses that much of his authority with students flows from their fear of blowing themselves to kingdom



come. He wishes he felt as comfortable, as in charge, in his personal life. He had looked for such a change when his father died. Not that he had ever uttered the words, "Now, you're the man in the family," as often happened in the stories that Paul enjoyed as a boy. But it was implied in the situation, and Paul had embraced the possibilities.

The problem is Tessie. She pushes him away at every turn, makes it clear that Estelle strikes her as something between a disappointment and a bore. Marrying Estelle had been his first truly independent act. He resents the implied criticism of his choice. Not that Tessie is ever openly critical, but on her infrequent visits to their home, he feels that her remarks, "This house is positively unliveable, Estelle. It's too clean. I'm afraid to sit down," made Estelle's impeccable housekeeping seem like a character flaw. Or the time when Tessie had come bearing an enormous fern saying, "I thought you needed something alive in here."

Would a baby change all that? He would be forty in a few months. He and Estelle have discussed having children, but the time never seems right. Even with tenure, teachers' jobs are endangered; space is a problem, especially if Tessie were to move in with them. Paul, lost in the fog of considerations, longs for the clarity of the lab.

**A** head-clearing is in order for Tessie as well. She considers a late afternoon walk along the bay. Jed reads her mind and bounds for the door. "Not so fast, old boy. First, I have to get a pot of soup started." As she drops the chopped celery, onions, kale, and browned sausage into the simmering stock, she looks for answers to the Paul dilemma in the golden brew; then laughs at her kinship with the wild sisters in *Macbeth*.

Feeling the need for a steady hand on the rudder, she decides to talk to Homer. After all, he is Paul's godfather, a responsibility he has taken much to heart. Besides, he is her best friend.

Homer had pulled Harlan out of a ditch on their shared road too many years ago to count, and Harlan had brought Homer back to the house to meet Tessie. Homer had observed the porch door needed fixing and offered to return with his tools. But not before Harlan, who was a lawyer, had

offered to look at a troublesome deed on Homer's property. It had been give and take ever since. Although Homer is a man considered an old coot by many in the village, he and Tessie had remained comfortable in their friendship after Harlan's death.

When the soup begins to fill the room with pungent aroma, Tessie reaches for her old flannel lumber shirt and heads down the rough path to the narrow sandy beach along the bay. Jed bounds ahead of her into the incoming tide in hopeless pursuit of a merganser fishing just beyond reach. She is jealous of the dog's ability to live in the moment oblivious of the odds, free of the endless anxieties that drag a body down. Preoccupied, she fails to notice the solitary figure walking in their direction. Jed sees Homer first and bounds up the shore to greet him. For Tessie, Homer has appeared to walk out of the setting sun in answer to her need.

She remembers the pot of soup simmering on the stove. Homer is partial to her soups, yet she knows he won't accept her invitation to join her for a bowl unless he can do more than talk. Homer puts a low value on talk. Well, there is that loose board. The wind is coming up, and it'll be banging all night.

"Homer, if you got the time, that board on the porch could stand a bit of hammering." Tessie throws the idea to the incoming tide.

"Yep, guess I could do that fer yer. Jist about light enough left."

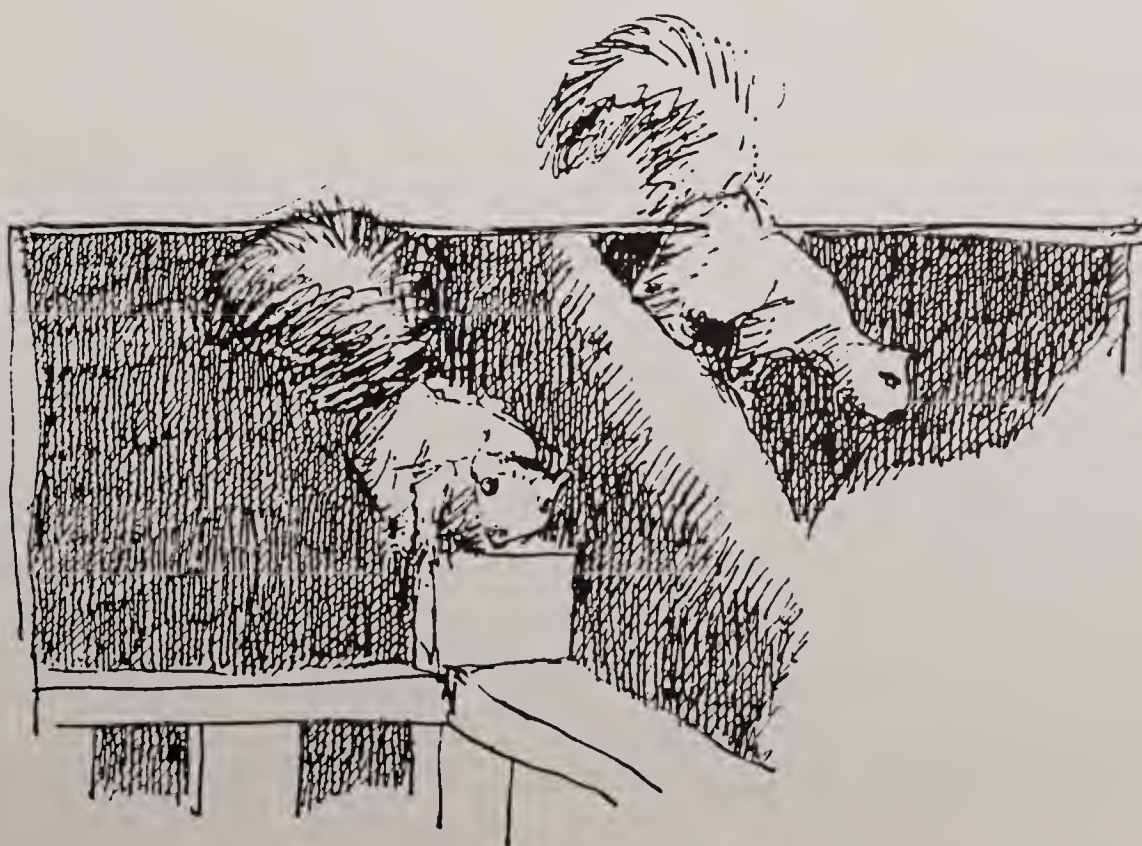
And so it is that an hour later Homer and Tessie sit at the round kitchen table slurping kale soup in comfortable silence. "I just don't know what to do about Paul," Tessie says, thinking out loud. "Seems like he won't be satisfied unless there's a man in this house."

"Good lord, Tessie gal, you proposin'? I lived alone some twenty years now—since my ma and pa died. I guess you could say I'm not the marrying kind."

Tessie chokes on her soup. "Homer, I married one man and I stayed married and it was good, but it was enough. Marriage was not what I have in mind. But I'm looking for a way to set Paul's mind at ease. He worries about me being alone, keeps pressuring me to move in with him and Estelle.

"You want I should talk to him?"

"Well, here's your chance. Don't turn around, but he's peering in the window right now, about to make his second inspection of the day. No doubt there'll be some lame excuse like Estelle made this great pie and







## Nealy Mansion

Fading light flickers  
on vacant eyes.  
Dead leaves skitter  
'cross weathered floor.  
The dying house trembles  
and settles once more—  
to wait.

—Marie Bunker  
Orting, Washington

he thought I'd like a piece. Thing is he needs to be relieved of his concerns about me whether he knows it or not. He needs to be starting a family of his own."

Even though she had initiated this, the idea of Homer and Paul having a man-to-man does not sit well with Tessie. She is thinking that a woman ought to find her own answers and not be continually dependent on men. Never one to push back divine inspiration, Tessie strides over to the record player, plunks the needle down on one of the old tangos she had been playing earlier, pulls Homer from his seat. "Dance with me," she demands.

"Sometimes you are plum crazy, Tessie. You know I can't dance. Never done it—ain't about to start now making a dang fool of myself."

"You don't need to do a thing, Homer. Just hang onto me." Tessie pulls him up by the shirt collar, clutches his hand, extends their

joined arms straight out, crouches in a pelvic thrust, and sweeps Homer back and forth across the room. Homer holds on for dear life, prepared for anything but the final dip to the floor and Tessie's kiss as the old record crunches to a halt.

**P**aul is dumbfounded. His knees buckle and he slides to a squat on the porch floor. His body shakes with silent, uncontrollable spasms. Tears roll down his face.

Is he laughing or crying? Paul isn't sure. Old Homer and his mother have been getting it on and he hasn't suspected a thing. Now, he understands why she has been so determined to stay in the cottage, why she has rejected his help. With a shrug, he leaves the pie in hand for the raccoons and heads back to the only home where he can be the man in the family.

Just as Tessie had suspected, Paul's face has

disappeared from the window. Catching her breath, she gasps, "There, that ought to get the ball rolling. You've been a big help, Homer."

Homer is backing toward the door, his eyes wild. "We been friends for a long time, Tessie, but this is the craziest thing you ever done." Reaching for his dignity, he pauses. "Lost the light. I'll fix the board tomorrow. Just as long as it's straight—no more dancin' or smoochin'. Time's gone by for that. Maybe I missed something, but things got to come in their time or not at all."

After Homer leaves, Tessie sits at the table talking to her husband. "Harlan, a long time ago you said to me, 'Tessie, there comes a time when a person has to grab life by the balls.' That's what I did today, Harlan, grabbed life by the balls."

*Shirley Davis lives in  
Brewster, Massachusetts.*



## The People-Owners

Woodland Estates  
Fern Grove  
Pine Ridge Acres

Homey names for walled subdivisions  
of monstrous houses on miniature lots  
of manicured velvet green grass  
and lonely baby trees.

Of an afternoon behind these walls,  
no dogs bark, no children shout.

The tempo picks up when the sun is setting.

The sport utilities roll in.  
Two kids pour out of each,  
race into the sprawling gold brick mansion,  
the stately presidential blue tri-level,  
the tasteful red brick "cottage."

The quality-time race begins amidst dinner,  
bath, bedtime.  
Conversations involve time, tick-tock,  
tick-tock time:  
Daddy will go to Denmark on business,  
at least two weeks.  
Mommy will work late tomorrow,  
at least until seven thirty.  
The sitter will pick you up early,  
before six-fifteen.  
We have to pack lunches tonight,  
before bedtime.

By seven a.m.,  
it's quiet again,  
and the houses,  
the great, insulated, air-conditioned,  
five-bedroom slave masters,  
relax.  
Their slaves are gone to toil  
for another twelve hours.

—Christine Gibson  
Harrodsburg, Kentucky

## Off County-Line Road

above the restless poplars  
a hermit moon has shaved the edge  
of reason. . .  
above the glassy blackness of the lake  
night birds are streaming into oblivion

\*

back off the road I saw  
a house returning to earth. . .  
—moss on the north-faced shingles—  
floorboards and beams in conspiracy  
with live oak and sawgrass—somewhere—  
a sleeper is breaking for the surface  
of his watery dream

—Raymond Zdonek  
Lake Station, Indiana

## Homecoming

Find a story stone,  
said the woman in my dream.

Next day I knelt,  
pressed palm to damp earth,  
pried one up,  
rubbed its smoothness,  
felt a soft rustling,  
like a membrane, crumpling,  
and the world rose up, green.

Those tree arms, reaching—  
that pond, warm bubbling  
below mud,  
frogs, chanting,  
tall cattails exploding into clouds,  
life sizzling, shape-shifting,  
bones, feathers, seeds, pods, stones  
sprinkled from  
god's tumbled shaker.

*The story is here.*

—Kathy Kennedy Tapp  
Janesville, Wisconsin



Photo by DEH



## ALL THE MONEY IN THE WORLD

*by Ruth Cash-Smith*

I go meet with the shrink, whom I have been working with for the past six months. My therapy consists mainly of my on-going debate with myself: shall I stay with my husband of ten years, I say each week, gesturing with my right hand—or shall I go with my lover, motioning with my left. So far, we've gotten nowhere, or so it seems to me.

Prone to ponderous silences, the prematurely balding therapist seldom utters a word, beyond his usual "so how are you today?" introduction. But today he interrupts my monologue with a question. "If you had all the money in the world, would you leave?" It takes me about two seconds to answer: Sure. After I say that, we just sit in silence for the rest of the hour.

Dazed, I drive home on the winding country roads, re-playing our conversation over in my head. If I stay only because I am in my last year of college and can't earn a living on

my own yet, aren't I prostituting myself? Mmmm, I don't like the sound of this. Not at all. By the time I pull into the driveway of our house, I figure out what this means I have to do.

Without getting out of the car, I shift into reverse, drive to the nearest local grocery, and load up my battered Toyota with cardboard boxes. Inside the house, I pack three cartons of books. Then I hit the bathroom, swiftly working my way through the medicine chest. The empty spaces look so forlorn that I adjust my husband's razor, Curex, and Calvin Klein cologne to camouflage my defection. Then I spin through the closets, taking only what I can cram into the two remaining cartons or carry out in arm loads.

Just as I finish loading the car, the predicted snowstorm begins. Hurrying, I return to the bathroom, draw a frosted-pink lipstick heart on the mirror. "Remember I love you," I write, wishing it were still true. I also leave

a note on the kitchen table: "Casserole in for 30 minutes @ 350 degrees. Have gone for a few days to sort out what I want. Don't worry. I'll call."

I gun the motor, fishtail out of the drive, and head onto the treacherously icy roads to my recently-divorced lover's mostly bare apartment.

"Here," I say, thrusting a box of clothes into his arms when he answers the bell. I trample through the mounting snow back to the car for an armful of clothes on hangers, find him still standing on the porch in his stocking feet, staring at me when I return.

"It's only for a little while," I lie, pushing past him into the foyer of my new home.

*Ruth Cash-Smith lives in  
Dennysville, Maine.*



## Love Without Words

My maternal grandfather, Archibald McIntyre, a distant man,  
A dour Scot if ever there was one.  
The mahogany buffet housed his rubber-banded bundle of number 2 pencils,  
Sharpened to hypodermic points.  
His frugality instructed me, "Write with one till it's a wee nub  
Before you take another."  
He allowed me to accompany him on his sojourns to the basement.  
I watched in awe as this five-foot-two-inch Thor opened the doors of Hell,  
Deftly wielded giant iron pinchers,  
And removed clinkers from the glowing coal furnace.  
He took so long to take his turn at checkers  
I would remind him, "Grandpa, it's your turn."  
"I'm strategizing!" was the terse response,  
As he knit his eyebrows like two white, fuzzy caterpillars.  
He could say the entire alphabet, backwards.  
He admonished me for:   jumping in his primly-raked pile of leaves,  
                                  riding to hounds on the back porch banister,  
                                  and sliding my wooden blocks along his highly-varnished  
                                  hardwood floor.

He rarely smiled.  
He never hugged me.  
Never kissed me.  
Never told me he loved me.  
Only held my hand for safety's sake when crossing the street.  
But, one night when I was tired of listening to the adults converse,  
I laid down on his bed atop the covers and closed my eyes.  
I smelled his shaving-soap scent enter the room.  
Thinking I was asleep, he opened his closet door.  
He took out his scratchy, wool overcoat,  
And wordlessly covered my skinny, bare legs.

—Gail Alice Komer  
Crown Point, Indiana

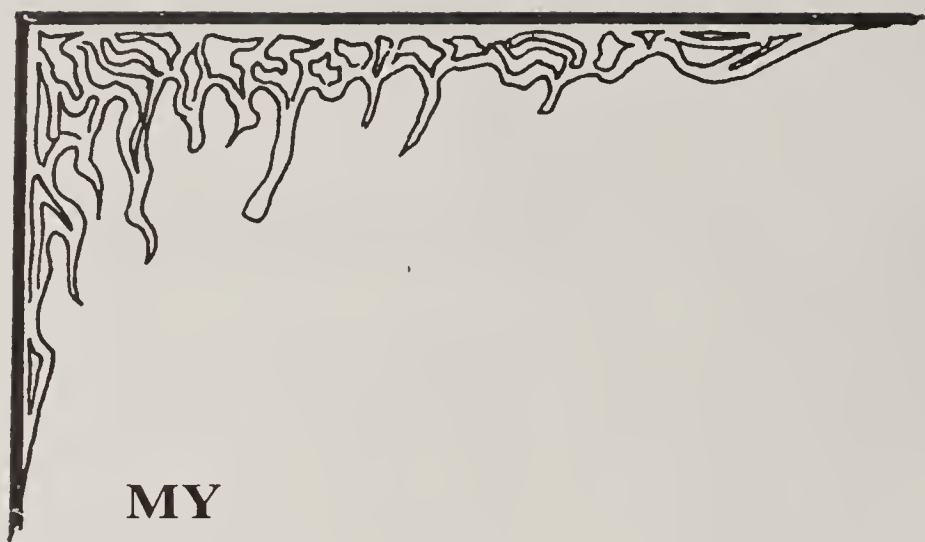
## One Address Of Youth

I come to  
36 Timrick Drive,  
Start painting  
My old house  
In nostalgia.  
I return  
Some days later,  
Realize the  
Second coat  
Of truth  
I apply  
Doesn't adhere  
To my primer  
Of memories.

—Timothy Hodor  
Vienna, Austria



Illustrations by Stacy Graan - Wilson



MY

## FATHER'S

### MAP

by Doris C. Baker

**M**y father's 1918 drawing of our farm came home from the framer today. It squeezes my heart, this map. I see it through a blur, a net of old memories caught in lines and spaces drawn to scale of the house and barns, woods, and fields where I grew up. To our family, it was a very special farm. In 1836, my great-grandfather, Bradley Martin, rode horseback into Michigan Territory as surveyor for a New York land company. He found the view from our hilltop so beautiful that he built his house there in the Romantic Style with square oak beams, the front facing a sweep of woods and rolling hills. It was named "The Willows" after a row of saplings that he brought with him from the family home in New York State and which he planted along the road.

It was different from the homes of our neighbors. In June, Italian roses bloomed on a slope near the house. French doors led to a balcony from the guest room, and the kitchen door was once the front door of the first bank in Detroit. During my childhood, we still used the original latch and large iron key. After Michigan became a state, the house was a stopping place for dignitaries traveling between Detroit and the capitol in Lansing.

Near the house is a big space on the map, a hilly bean field I slid down on my father's skis. Its boundary was the road curving down to the mailbox where I walked mornings, trailed by two cats and a crow flying above us through the trees. One spring day, the crow had fallen out of its nest, and when my father tried to put him back, the mother crow was gone and he fell out again. So, we named him Jimmy and fed him fat, white grubs clamped into my mother's curling iron and poked half-way down his throat.



**T**hriving on his grub diet, the crow, in due course, grew up and, to their utter consternation, became friendly with our two cats. He liked the black one better than the tiger, perhaps perceiving her as a distant relative, and often strutted perkily along beside her, hopping faster and faster to keep up, and crowing into her ear as loudly as he could. Finally, exasperated beyond endurance, she would bowl him over with a fast left and then right paw. Fluttering his wings frantically to regain balance and squeaking in a crow whisper, Jimmy teetered along until, full of his story, the

squeaks turned into squawks and the whole process began again.

On the map, my finger follows the lane behind the barns and hired-man's house to a crooked line, a creek full of zigzagging water bugs and dragonflies darting above its shallow trickle. Muddy banks were dented by hoofprints of cows and horses who stopped there to drink, and sometimes I found a turtle asleep on a rock near its edge.

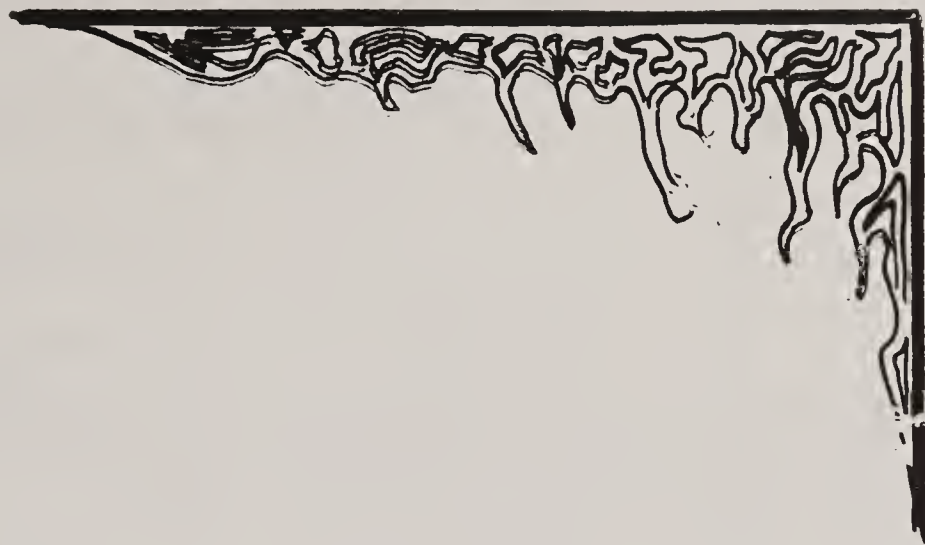
**T**he creek was the scene of one of my grandmother's favorite stories about her older brother, Ned. One day he held her hand and said, "Come on, Eva, let's jump over the creek." She jumped, and he didn't. Great-grandmother Martha was not pleased to see Eva trudging back to the house with her clothes muddy and various denizens of the creek still clinging to her long hair.

Between the house and barn was the garden. Every other day of the season, we picked strawberries—sweet-ripe, warmed by the sun. Those days, lunch was a large bowl of hot, buttered shortcake swimming in sugary, crushed berries, the thought of which sustained us through long, sweaty, back-breaking mornings. On alternate days, I awoke gloating over the prospect of nothing worse to do than chase baby pigs out of the garden—so much squealing and kicking up of heels as they tore helter-skelter in all directions.

The tool shed across from the garden had a dusty upstairs where my friends and I played house. Our entertainments were simple. We made "jam" out of orange lilies and wild asparagus plumes that grew in a deep ravine in the yard, and we pretended that large brown puff balls were loaves of bread. Sometimes, we rolled downhill in a blanket, this activity leaving us black and blue and dizzily happy.

A classmate who lived along the main road often brought me rabbits which his mother raised. My mother always asked Elmer if he was sure they were boy rabbits and he always assured her they were. A few days





later, we invariably had a lot of baby bunnies. I remember the last one was adorable, white with a black moustache. We called her Charlie Chaplin until the inevitable happened. From then on, my mother refused all rabbit offerings, saying we already had quite enough animals on the farm.

Our house, a faded red shape on my father's map, was spacious, unpainted, with a large open-front porch, weathered panels of natural wood, graceful, belonging to the land around it and filled with memories long before I lived there.

At the top of the stairs by the banister was my favorite reading place, which was next to a window commanding a view of the side yard and the branches of a tree. In the spring, I could look down into a blue jay's nest. My presence there wasn't immediately obvious to my mother, who thought I was ruining my eyes with too much reading. While I was in the middle of a fascinating Henty book, she would think up chores for me such as ironing handkerchiefs or dusting our dining

room table, which was in the Eastlake style and adorned with an incredible number of hard-to-reach planes and surfaces.

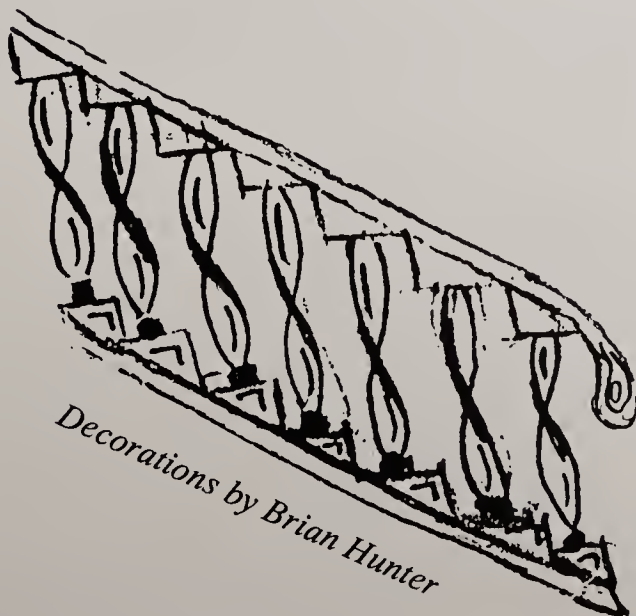
The map was in the living room. I visualize it still under glass on my father's desk. On the wall above this desk was a photograph of Glacier Park from his years in the Forest Service. In another corner of the room was the chair where he sat patiently, encouraging me while I drew his portrait. I still hear my mother's contralto as she sang "Felice" at the piano, and I see the horsehair sofa with carved wooden grapes where I listened to her in the lamplight after supper.

In the evenings, the crow loved to fly among the maples and tall evergreens in the front yard, then light on my father's shoulder, sliding down his arm, head cocked on one side, making sleepy, nighttime conversation. My father was a good listener, and I think they understood each other quite well as darkness filled the porch.

During spring cleaning, while Mother and Grandmother were too busy washing windows to wonder where I was, I liked to sit on the porch steps, watching curtains billowing on the clothesline and watching the sky trails of birds swooping through space—farther

than our land, farther than even the crow wanted to follow. I was like a cat stretching itself luxuriously into a state of otherness, letting my senses take over—the warm sun, the breeze fresh from patches of leftover snow in the fields and fragrant with the sweetness of violets and trillium in our woods.

Gazing through the trees into the distance and somehow mesmerized by sun and shadow, I dreamed of far-away places too exotic for my country mind to imagine. Since then I've traveled to those far-away places—Petra, Xian, Bou Saada. But the place crystal-clear in my memory, where I long to return, is on my father's map. And years, not miles, separate us.



*Decorations by Brian Hunter*

*Doris C. Baker lives in Virginia Beach, Virginia.*



## IT AIN'T LIKE IT USED TO BE

by Ruth Cash-Smith

I don't know why I just don't sell the house and move into an apartment," my mother lamented during our last weekly phone conversation. "Wanda and Pup are down the block, all holed up in their place like it's a fortress. They bought this new fancy alarm system, which they can't figure out how to work for the life of them, and the whole neighborhood gets disturbed every week or so when they set the darned thing off by mistake.

"When your Dad was alive, the four of us used to have so much fun, but now they don't get out much any more, except to gospel sings or farm auctions. They could ask me to go with them, but they never do. Wanda's getting so fat she looks like a stuffed toad perched up on that new two-thousand-dollar couch her daughter bought her. Why, her little feet don't even touch the floor.

"And Pup, she's so jealous of him she won't let him out of her sight. Land sakes, he's nearly eighty and toothless, after all. I had to ask him three times before he came down here to fix my faucet and when he finally got around to it, she came trailing along, too. Did I tell you he's losing weight? He must have lost 30 or 40 pounds over the winter. I bet he has cancer or maybe even something worse. He looks jaundiced to me.

"And Delores. Now, there's a crazy neighbor for you. She ain't been right since she went through the change thirty years ago. She drags over here two or three times a week, wagging in some of that greasy Southern cooking. Most times I throw it out after she leaves, but I have to say she sure can bake. Her gooseberry pie's the best in the county.

"And guess what? That Lurene of hers is knocked up again. Four kids, four fathers and now another one on the way. Delores ends up having to give Lurene some of her social security money at the end of the month to buy milk for those babies. If I was

Delores, I'd make her get fixed, running all over town like some dog in heat. Enough's enough.

"Did I tell you about poor old Mary? She don't even know her own husband died last winter. I went by Twin Oaks Nursing Home last month and she just lays there curled up in a ball, same as when she went into that coma two years ago. Don't you remember how pretty she used to look, sitting out on her porch after dinner in the summer? We'd always wave across the street to each other and neighbor a bit. Now, her hair's turned pure white and she's got a feeding tube stuck up her nose. And that niece of hers, the one who inherited what was left of Carl and Mary's savings, why I heard tell she only goes by once a month to check on Mary. Now, that's no way to be. Their house is still for sale but it's beginning to look kinda run-



down with nobody to take care of it. I hope some decent people buy it.

"Lord forbid anything ever happens to me like it did to Mary. Birdie Crawford next door is deaf as a post. I could holler for help 'til I turned blue and she'd never hear me. And God forbid I should have to depend on Juanita Calloway across the way. She sticks her nose in everybody's business. Did I tell you she comes prowling around to see how I'm doing and I just pretend I don't hear her

so I don't have to let her in? No telling what tales she might carry to those hoity-toity types she pals around with up at the Methodist church if I let her in on my business.

No, it ain't like it used to be, that's for sure. Folks used to neighbor and keep an eye out for each other, but now it's like they forgot all about that. But you don't need to worry about me. I get along fine. And that ankle I sprained last week when I fell off the ladder washing the attic windows is doing just fine, although I still get a lot of pain at night. Not that I can sleep anyway. That crazy Bub from down the street comes creeping around damned near every night. He was pecking at my window just last night about three in the morning, after the taverns all shut down. 'You go

on home now,' I yelled out at him. 'I called the police and they're on their way.' I swear, it's a wonder the law don't send him back to the penitentiary. It ought to be a crime to be such a pest. I always swore he was retarded but his folks never did have the money to get him tested so nobody can say for sure.

"But, I guess this old place is home. I got too many memories here and too much stuff to think about moving. I don't know what'll happen to all of it when I'm gone. Now, don't you forget, I got all my important papers in the top desk drawer. You go through them when I'm gone and you'll know what I want done. You're the oldest and you know I'm counting on you to do right by me.

"So, when you coming home again for a visit, baby?"

*Ruth Cash-Smith lives in Dennysville, Maine.*



## Homeless

### City Space

Dormant towers  
sleeping in the night  
housing box of life  
single souls hovering  
hidden from our sight

Welcome nest  
leafless tree  
concrete rest  
home for me.

—Nancy J. Stamper  
Griffith, Indiana

Haunting dark doorways  
lying down to sleep at night

Covered by our darkness  
searching for a light

Fearful  
formless  
faces crying

hungry  
hopeless  
helpless  
dying

Children of  
a lesser God  
asleep upon  
our asphalt sod

Now we lay you  
down to sleep  
lulled by music  
of the street

**Hush**  
ye homeless  
don't you cry  
**Feed**  
on your hunger  
till you die.

—Nancy J. Stamper  
Griffith, Indiana

### Apostrophe to an Abandoned Farm

You, grass, roots spreading  
across the prairie fields:  
I lie in you  
to catch your tickle  
on my skin,  
no corn planted near.

You, pulleys, clothes once hanging  
across the farm house yard,  
stretched from porch to leaning pole:  
I press my ear down  
on the shell of your former squeaking  
and hear on ocean of imagined sheets  
and towels slapping across  
the wind-like waves of your rusty squeal.

You, trees, groves of you  
like knives cutting through  
the sunlight with summer shadows  
of leaves too filled with sap to fall,  
to blow across the emptied fields like chaff:  
I climb your shoot-laced heart  
and bleed my knuckles where I scrape them  
over coarse-branched bark.

You, house, abandoned to the constant winds,  
the barn already fallen,  
the graineries leaning,  
the weeds around you summer-deep and door-knob high,  
growing tallest where the cow-yard stood:  
I enter you, climb your stairs,  
lean out your broken-glass sashes  
as if looking for the wind-creaking  
gallows and the rope that hanged this place  
and made it die.

You, rural grave, unremembered home  
of some farmer's hopes,  
hopes lived for once, one crop at a time,  
as if nothing mattered but fields and harvests,  
rains and drying winds:  
I sink like you now,  
a shadow of former aspirations,  
while fords and chevies squirt  
rapidly down the new-cut interstate,  
unaware of these unstabled country things.

—Michael Galati  
Lemont, Illinois

## “Where Love Is God Is Also”

—a watercolor by Charles Burchfield, 1936

Late sun tints the windowpanes of winter  
Facing west—a last, inglorious glow,  
As if to reassure a frozen world  
Light shall return, all shall be well again.

The rows of houses huddled together seem  
Resigned to be standing idle until spring—  
Their wooden shingles glazed, their icy roofs  
Angled sharply to shed the heavy loads

A sudden storm can bring. In one of these,  
Under a slant roof sloping down to the street,  
Supper is laid on a table in plain view

Of anybody who wants to stop and stare,  
The windows wide and curtainless, a door  
Framing the warmth of a bright interior.

### II

Framed in the tall glass door, a woman stands  
Gripping a pitcher, her back to us. She stands  
Resolutely industrious, as the others—  
The two children, the woman and the man,

Bend their heads in the Blessing. It almost seems  
Appropriate to be standing here looking in—  
The snow knee-high in the street, the rising wind  
Forecasting bitterness. It brings to mind

The Tolstoy story about the hungry boy  
Invited into a peasant hut, to share  
Whatever was in the pot. They knew, of course,

Where love is, God is also. They offered him  
The little they had and gladly until he was full,  
And blessed them all, and smiled, and disappeared.

### III

He blessed them all, and smiled, and disappeared—  
A sack of gold coins laying where he sat.  
Perhaps these people at table know about  
Stories like that and others, that they tell

Around the table at supper in a tongue  
None of their neighbors know. Perhaps they leave  
Their windows curtainless, naked in the night,  
Because they believe in sharing what they have—

And what they have is inexhaustible.  
The wind is rising, tinkling the icicles.  
The brittle sound of ice sliding down eaves

Startles until it coughs to a stop. The house  
Seems secure in its yellow bliss. There is  
Just enough snow swept off to climb the steps.

—David George  
Sacramento, California





## Mother Never Talked About The Old Country

Maybe you spun  
like a brightly-colored top,  
then landed on your side.

Or maybe you were blindfolded  
as if playing hide-and-seek,  
and wherever you stopped

you went straight ahead,  
no turns allowed.  
You must have whispered

the clip-clop of your shoes  
so no one could hear  
your little-girl uncertainty

as you followed your people  
in 1920  
across Europe to the big boat.

There was no playground  
for your whims.  
Rules were strict in steerage.

Some stayed in the shtetl  
to touch the *mezuzah* on their doorpost  
and kiss their fingers in prayer

as they entered their home.  
They stayed to roast the chicken,  
bake the challah,

kindle the Sabbath lights.  
Later—years later—  
they were herded to a forest,

their candles still burning,  
challah burning, chicken burning.  
The new tenants

pulled the *mezuzah* out of the wood,  
flung nails across the road;  
while here in this country

you sanctified your doorpost,  
cooked kosher,  
lit Sabbath candles,

and served us dinner in silence—  
always in silence.

—Sandra Goldsmith  
Chicago, Illinois



## Alone Inside

The TV on. The voices from actors speak.  
The light in the room  
black and white—shadows bouncing  
off all four corners.  
She said it felt better to be inside than  
outside but she was lying, she only  
hoped that the sun would not go away  
and that maybe next time she'd make it  
out the door.

—Dianne Robitaille  
Somerville, Massachusetts

## Between Two Worlds

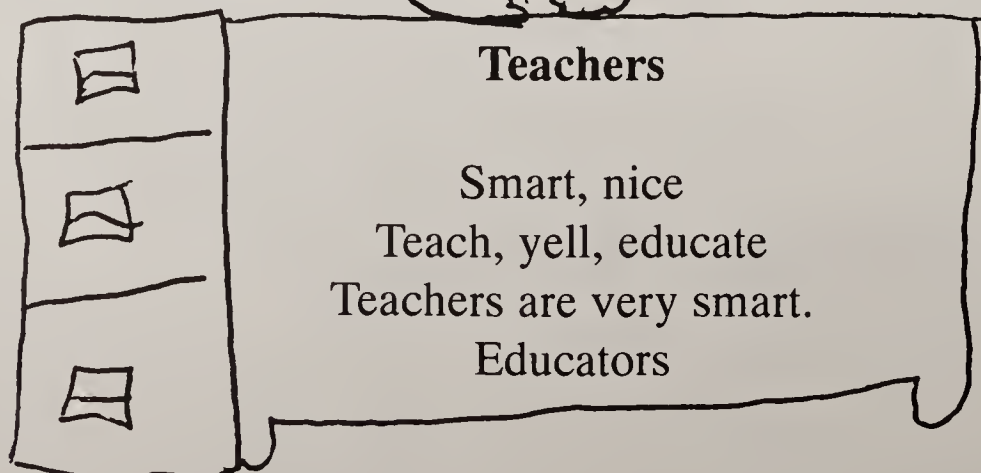
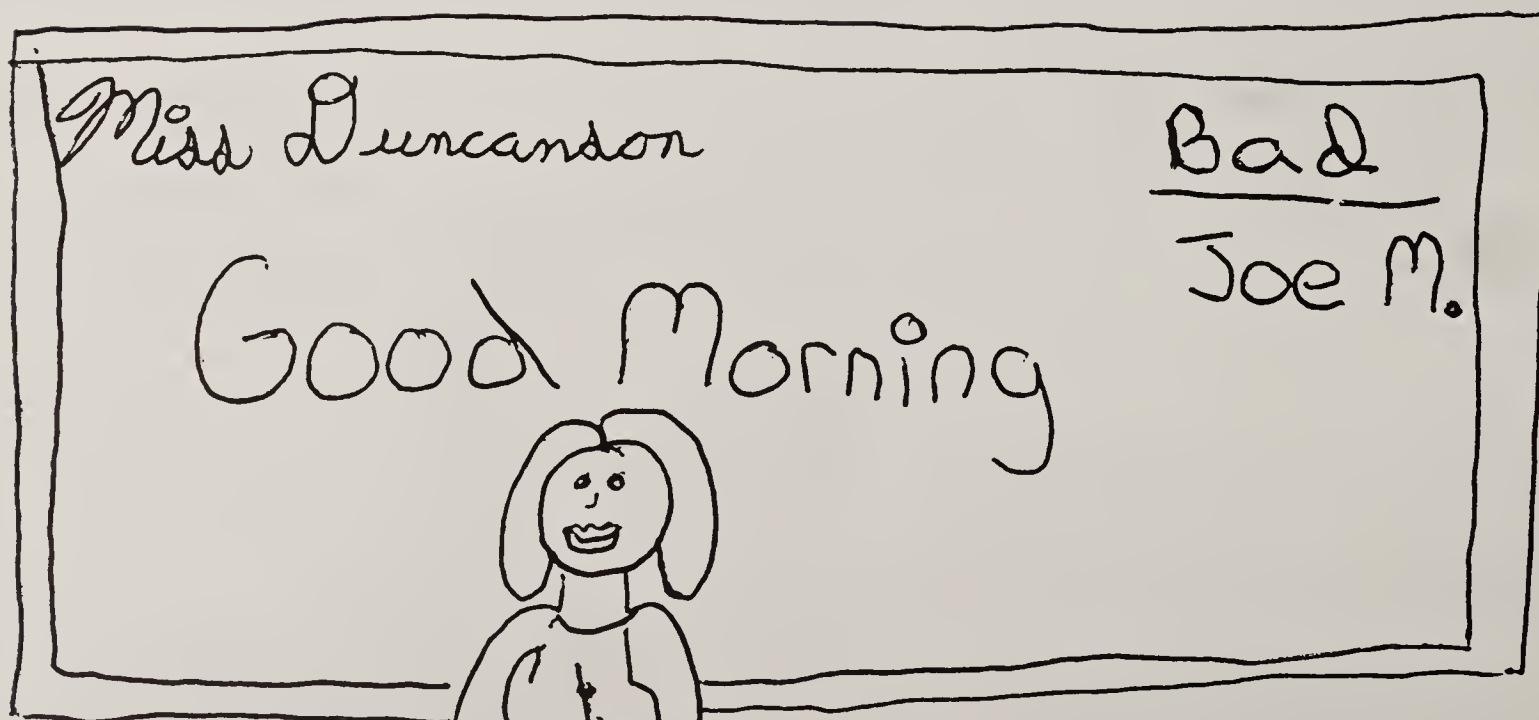
Some Bosnian refugees  
Are about to return home.  
Others stay in Vienna.

A bus window filters tears.  
Mothers and children  
Continue to cry.

Darkness waves good-bye  
To the past  
And to the future.

—Timothy Hodor  
Vienna, Austria





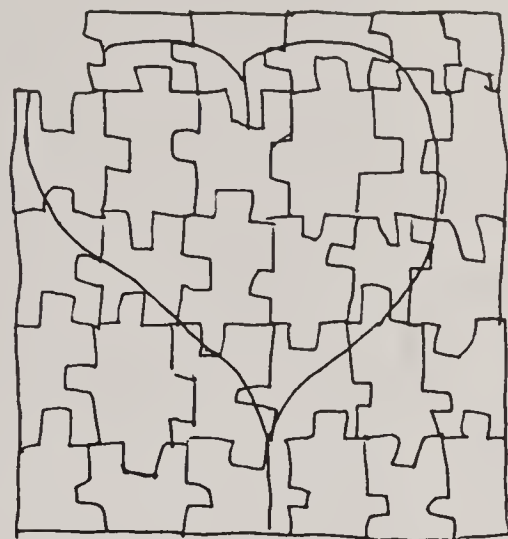
**SHIRLEY JO MORITZ**  
**EDITOR**





## Snakes

Long, ugly  
Swim, bite, eat  
They sit all day.  
Reptiles



## Puzzles

Difficult, frustrating  
Challenges, masters, finishes  
Some are very easy.  
Pictures

## Stinkbug

Smelly, small  
Fast, stinks, flies  
The stinkbug is smelly.  
Insect



## Friends

Fun, playmates  
Plays, runs, swims  
Friends play with friends.  
Kids

## POEMS and ILLUSTRATIONS by 5th Graders of

J.W. Riley Elementary  
Hammond, Indiana

"Friends" by Kyle Bennett  
"Puzzles" by Kim Edens  
"Teachers" by Lucia Medina  
"Snakes" by Rachel Salinas  
"Stinkbug" by Chris Woodworth

*Calligraphy for "Young Writers"*  
on facing page by  
Erika Fink, Age 13,  
Whiting, Indiana

## BACK IN TIME

by Sarah Richardson

One rainy, stormy afternoon Lindsey, my sister, and I were playing soccer in the house because we could not go outside and play. Mom and Dad told us not to play soccer in the house. As soon as Mom and Dad left for the grocery store, I started to play soccer. I kicked the ball far and high. When I saw it hit our grandfather clock, I screamed! I stopped to look at the smashed glass. Right then, Mom and Dad came home. They opened the door, carrying groceries. Mom said, "What on earth happened here?"

I stared at Lindsey who had just come into the room, heading to the kitchen for a snack. "Lindsey broke the clock," I said. "I told her she wasn't supposed to play soccer in the house."

"But I didn't do anything," Lindsey said.

"Lindsey, you are grounded for a whole week!" Mom said. "No telephone, no TV, no candy and no going over to friends' houses."

Dad said, "Go to your room now!"

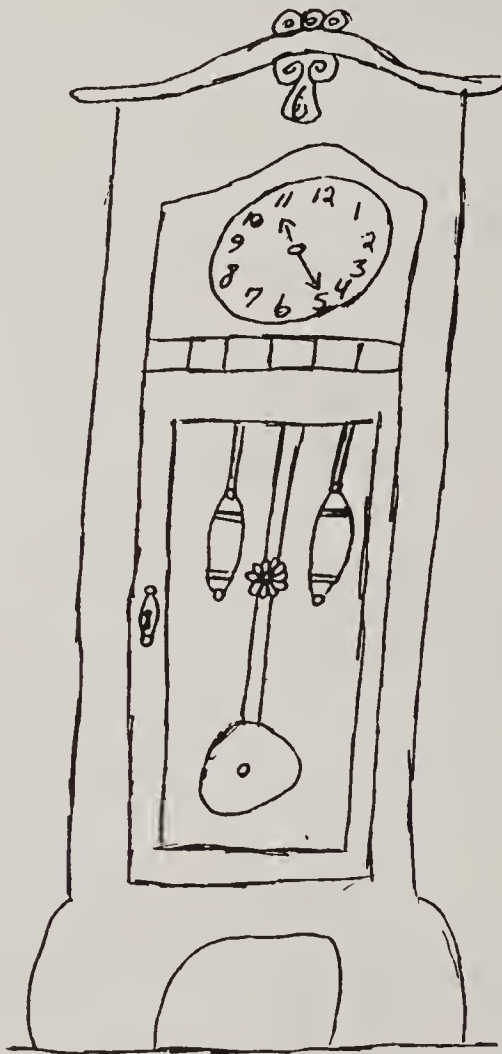
And without protesting, she went. While Mom and Dad went to clean up the mess, I skipped downstairs and started to play Legos.

Later that night, Dad had gone out to feed Mickey, my horse. Mickey is a special horse. He has a beautiful white star in the middle of his forehead. All of a sudden, Dad noticed the horse was not in his pen. He saw a broken board. "Mickey has run away," he said out loud. He spent all night looking for Mickey. In the morning, he came inside to tell us what happened. When he told us about it, we cried.

That day, Mom and Dad decided to get a grandfather clock at the old antique shop. Mom and Dad bought a cherry-colored clock. When we got home, we put it on the table and we went to bed. In the middle of the night, I got up to get a drink of water, but then I remembered that the clock had not been set, so I set it to twelve o'clock. Then, I got a drink of water and went back to bed. I woke up the next morning, got dressed and went to get some candy. I walked outside. I screamed. Everybody looked at me. Everybody was wearing cowboy boots, and

hats, and carrying guns. I looked around and realized that I wasn't at home anymore. I dashed back inside. I sprinted up the stairs, jumped into bed, and whispered to myself, "It's only a dream, and I will wake up soon."

Illustration by Jackie Fink, Age 11  
Whiting, Indiana



Then I remembered about breaking the old clock and saying that Lindsey broke it. I got out of bed and sneaked out of the old building. Then I walked quickly toward a bank to trade four quarters for a dollar. I went inside. I just got up to the front of the line when two men came in with guns and with bandanas over their faces. Everybody stood in one place. The robbers pushed me aside and said, "Give us all the money you've got!" The banker got out thousands and thousands of dollars. He put it in a bag. I told the robber, "If you don't move...."

"If I don't move, what?" said the robber.

"UUH, UUH, I'll go get the sheriff."

"The sheriff is on a fishing trip until tomorrow."

Before I could say anything, he grabbed my

arm and pulled me out the door, while the other robber got the money. He said, "Let's go, Jimmy!" He came out with the bag full of money. They got on their horses and put me in front of Jimmy. Then we rode and rode until we came to an old barn. We stopped at the entrance. They opened the door, shoved me in, and locked the door. I banged on the door, but it did not budge. I turned around and, to my great surprise, I saw at least ten horses in stalls. For a while, I petted the horses. I spotted a stall that was empty. I went to it and opened the latch. I closed the door behind me and looked up at the stall next to me. I saw a horse with a star on its forehead. "Mickey," I said. He moved his ears a little. I said, "Okay, Mickey, let's get out of this place." He neighed as if to say, "OK." I opened the stall. We walked over to the door. I said, "Kick the door down, Mickey." He did.

I jumped on Mickey's back and we galloped and galloped until we got to the town. Then we rode to where the sheriff lived. I jumped off Mickey and ran to the door. The sheriff said, "Come in." It appeared that he had just gotten home from his fishing trip. I told him what had happened, and he said that he believed me. He went outside and saddled up his horse. I said that I had some stuff to do. I hopped on Mickey's back and rode to the place that I had been staying at. When I was there, I spotted an antique shop. I rode to the shop. I went inside and found a clock that looked just like the one my parents had bought. I set it to twelve o'clock. Then I rode back to the place that I had been staying at. I went to bed. I woke up in my own room. I ran outside and saw Mickey. I ran back inside and woke up my mom and dad and told them about breaking the old clock. But I did not tell them about going back in time. I got grounded for a whole month and Lindsey got "ungrounded."

By the way, I learned a lesson that day. NEVER SET A CLOCK BACKWARDS, ESPECIALLY WHEN YOU'VE GOT AN ANTIQUE CLOCK.

Sarah Richardson, Age 8,  
lives in Clearwater, Kansas.





*Illustration by Amanda Diehl, Age 14  
Merrillville, Indiana*

## Summer Sun

The summer sun is so golden,  
Each flash of light like a star.  
When I sit down in my garden,  
I wonder what they really are.

Maybe they are aliens,  
Or some rocket ships.  
Maybe they are dandelions,  
Could they be finger tips?

I've made up my mind about it,  
It's just a summer sun.  
So bright and shiny golden,  
With warmth and light for everyone.

It draws people to the beach,  
And brings people to the park,  
Where they stay and have fun  
Until it gets dark.

Then the sun goes away,  
Leaving us in our beds.  
While we sleep there and dream,  
About the sunrise ahead.

—Yael Cohen, Grade 3  
Yeshiva Shaarei Tzion  
Piscataway, New Jersey

## Spring

Spring is the best,  
So are the rest.  
Spring is cool,  
You could swim in a pool.  
You can never stay still,  
When there's food on the grill.  
Why would you lay,  
When you want to play.  
Bees are busy,  
Tornadoes are dizzy.  
Mosquitoes pinch,  
Try not to flinch.  
Drink some punch,  
With your lunch.  
People sing—  
WHEN IT'S SPRING!

—Alex Hernandez, Age 8  
Highland, Indiana

## Where Birds Fly

Birds fly south,  
where it's warm.  
Birds fly in the sky,  
where it's windy.  
Birds fly through trees,  
where it's shady.  
Birds fly in the wild,  
where there is tall grass.

—Grace Shrader, Age 7  
Chesterton, Indiana

## Thoughts

jumbled in my mind  
crawling about  
like thousands of angry insects  
with no destination,  
thoughts emerge  
through cracks and crevices  
to nurture my life  
to anguish, to fold

—Sandra Ogle, Age 16  
Corpus Christi, Texas

## My Soulmate, My Shadow

### She Is Frightened

She's not scared of monsters.  
She's not scared of the boogie-man.  
She's not scared of dying.

She thinks she's hungry,  
but she can't get up to eat.  
She thinks she'll pass a mirror on the way  
to the kitchen.  
Even if she tries not to look,  
she can see her ugly reflection  
in the silver gleaming square.

Her hair is thinning.  
She can't stand up.  
She thinks she is ugly,  
but she doesn't care  
because—  
She's not scared of dying.

She feels alone,  
but she's not scared.  
She wants to be alone.

She feels ugly today.  
She felt that way yesterday  
and the day before,  
so she didn't eat.

Her mom put the dinner plate in front of her.  
The smell, the bright colors;  
The yellow butter sauce  
smothered the main dish.  
She couldn't even see what it was.  
She couldn't handle it.

She is not scared of dying;

She is scared of food.  
She is scared of fat.  
She is scared of herself;  
But she is not  
scared of dying.

—Lisa Schwartz, Grade 10  
Clarkstown North High School  
New City, New York

My golden shadow walks naked with no shame.  
She admires unique style and lets you know it.  
Her strong hair sweeps the floor  
and carries your envy with it.  
My shadow is all races and all experiences,  
loving the shock it sends through ignorant eyes.  
She walks up to a stranger and learns who he is,  
then dances a waltz with him and runs.

My shadow tells people they are beautiful,  
and they don't need to connect themselves in any way.  
Every time she sees an image pop out of the clouds above her head,  
she excitedly leans over to explain to whoever is there.  
She is not satisfied until she's convinced that they see it also.

She will explain to you why she does not love you,  
not to hurt you, only to be fair,  
because it is the lie of love that hurts. . . .

Occasionally, she'll convince me to do something crazy,  
and I love it.

—Rosalinda Martinez, Age 17  
Houston, Texas

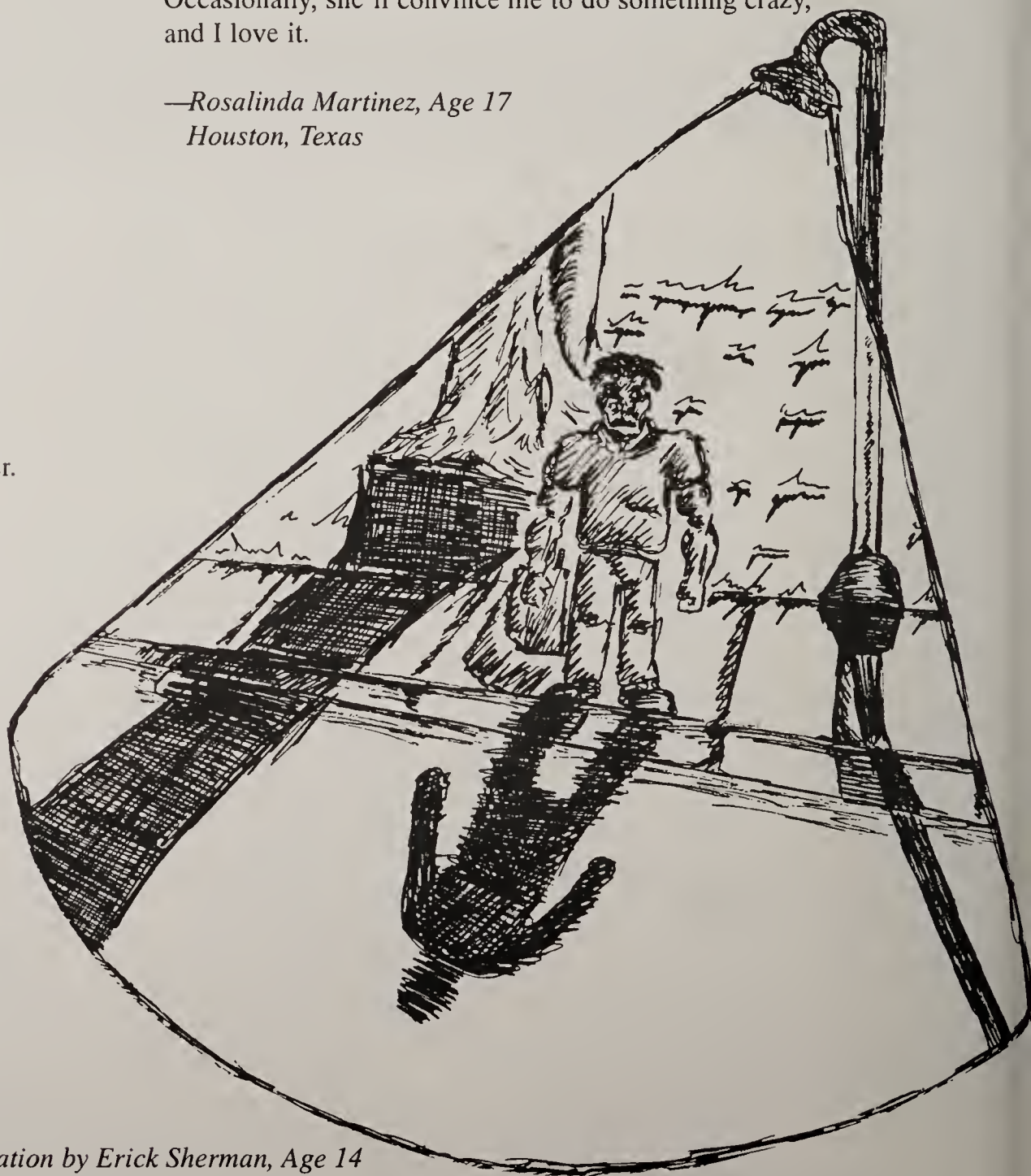


Illustration by Erick Sherman, Age 14  
Hammond, Indiana



## New York

Huge, busy  
Raining, snowing, hailing  
My favorite eastern state.  
Metropolis

*Poem and illustration by  
Ian Blackwood, Grade 5  
James Whitcomb Riley School  
Hammond, Indiana*



## HENRY

*by Tina Greenberg*

**H**e lives on the corner of Maple and Thirty-First Streets. His belongings are piled into a large rusted-out shopping cart from the supermarket down the street. The wheels always squeak when he pushes it down his sidewalk-hallway.

Sometimes, he buys a carton of coffee and an order of fries from Ann's Luncheonette. And he goes to the park in the afternoon when the sun is out, to share his lunch with the birds and squirrels. The squirrels like him and, when he sits on the large rock under the old spruce, they run to him.

His eyes are a cold gray—an absence of color. Linda took the color away seven years ago when she left. His eyes were once the color of a rich field of grass in mid-July. The grass that he and Linda would cover with their red picnic blanket as they sat eating the tuna sandwiches Linda had packed that morning in her mother's picnic basket.

The green is gone.

He spends his afternoons watching people walk by. And he wonders where they are going. Sometimes, they are off to the supermarket, or the laundromat, or the bank. But sometimes, he sees Linda. She used to walk down Maple Street every morning at eight as

she headed for the diner. She waitressed every day from eight-thirty till five. He remembers the way he loved the time when she would come home after a long day at the diner and fall asleep in her uniform. He would find her on the couch when he came from the station.

He lined telephone poles for the county telephone company. He liked his job and his partner. They worked together for six years before they were both "laid off due to downsizing." That's what the boss said. Henry and his partner called it "fired." But they had been the hardest workers in the district.

**S**ometimes, when Linda was on lunch, she would surprise him and go to the station. She knew how much he liked orange soda pop, and she would always bring him a bottle. Each day, Linda had packed lunch for him in a brown paper bag. A tuna sandwich—her specialty—would be wrapped up in silver foil. She always watched what he ate.

There is a bench in the park where he likes to sit—watching the bees gather their nectar from blossom to blossom. The fragrant smell of the daffodil reminds him of her hair. Linda's bottles of shampoo were always

lined up on the ledge in the shower. When he would pull the curtain closed, they'd always fall down—all of them; and he would get angry and curse her under his breath. Especially, if it was in the morning and after he had just woken up.

Now, he wouldn't mind picking up the bottles.

The building across from the drug store has been repainted. Some rowdy kids covered it with graffiti a month ago. He watched for a week while a man in brown overalls covered the bricks with green paint. He remembered when Linda had picked out the paint for their apartment when they moved into it that spring. She wanted the walls in the kitchen to be green. And that is what they painted them. He knows that, after they moved out, the walls were painted over with white or beige because green was a mere relic of Linda. No one else liked green walls.

And so, what better way to celebrate Linda than to cover her grave in a blanket of color? Green.

*Tina Greenberg, Age 17,  
attends Clarkstown North High School  
in New City, New York.*

## The Walk

The night was cool, your gaze was warm.  
You took a chance, and I took your arm.  
We walked together, down a narrow road.  
When I needed help, you shared my load.  
The path continued, the way was clear.  
When I stumbled, you wiped my tears.  
We traveled on, our hands held tight.  
With you there, I had no fright.  
As we went on, it began to rain.  
You were my shelter, and kept me sane.  
The rain had stopped, but the road, still wet.  
You held me close, and said not to fret.  
The rain soon dried, but the path was gone.  
With confident hearts, we traveled on.  
We made a new path, our purpose was true.  
I would never be lost, when I was with you.  
Our new road continued, but soon it divided.  
Things were never the same, once we decided.  
You went your way, and I went mine.  
Though my world seemed dark, the sun still shined.  
Your path faded, and you were suddenly lost.  
You realized what your decision had cost.  
You called my name, and I heard your plea.  
I ran to your side, and you leaned on me.  
The path continues, and we journey on.  
Our past is remembered, but the feelings are gone.  
Our new path is long, untrod, and so wide.  
Though you led the way once, you're now by my side.  
We'll travel the road to its very end.  
And when I call you, I call you my friend.  
We'll walk together, down our new road.  
When you need help, I'll share your load.  
If the path we follow becomes unclear,  
I'll take your hand, and we'll face our fears.  
I pray that our path will never end.  
But if it does, it was the path of friends.

—Traci Johnson, Age 17  
Wilder, Idaho

## Spicy Foods

A jazz band is pluckin' a fast song  
On my tongue,  
And my eyes are starting to bleed  
But I love it,  
A pepper plays the drums  
When I exhale,  
And curry strums up a storm  
On the bass guitar,  
While the water chugs away  
With a shiny sax,  
And oregano screams in the microphone  
Hanging in the back of my throat,  
Cheeks exploding with spicy resonance

—Zachary Warren, Age 15  
Charleston, West Virginia

## Spirit of Mercury

(The Lament of a Driver's Education Student)

Spirit incarnate of that great Roman god  
Who soared at great speeds with hardly a prod.  
I set off on my journey, an intention in mind  
To make a good pace in my very short time.  
Twice I was told, and twice I ignored,  
Warnings to release the pedal I floored.  
Clever indeed was the trap that was set—  
At seven miles of excess, I went into its net.  
These Mercury feet had betrayed me, my friend,  
To become my Achilles' Heel in the end!

—Sam Crawford, Age 16  
Kankakee Valley High School  
Wheatfield, Indiana



Illustration by Erik Hunter, Age 12  
Riverview, Florida



## Girls' Ice Hockey

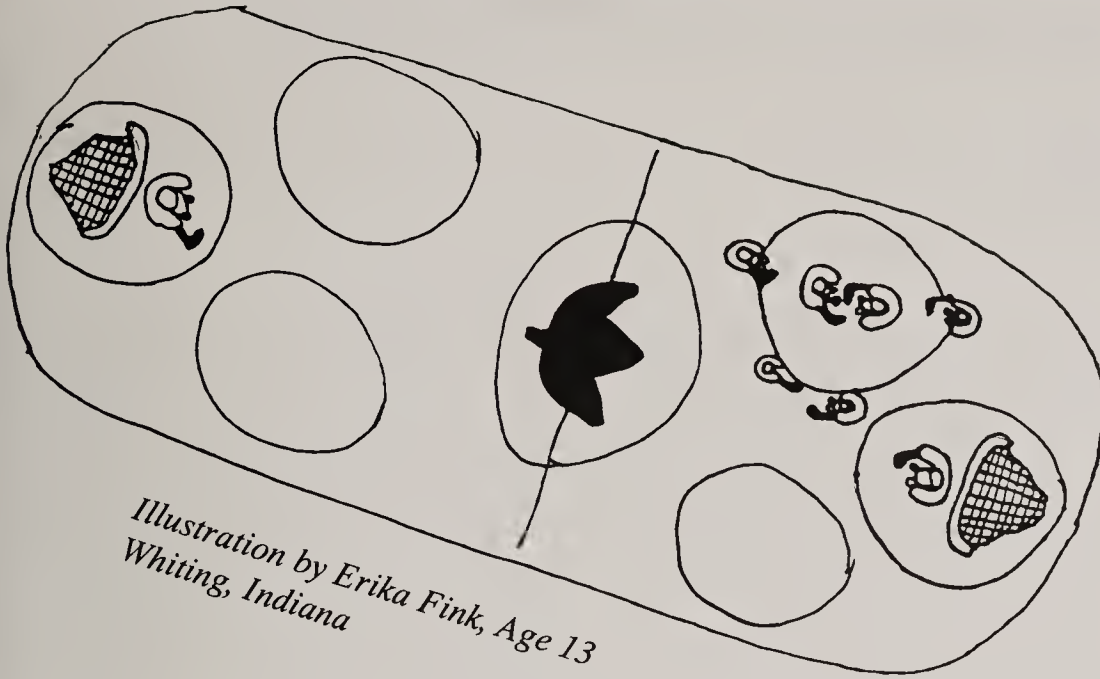
Some people think it's a joke,  
but I think it's cool.  
So, we're not as good as the guys—  
well, we *won*, right?  
They didn't.

We were  
getting checked into the boards,  
bodies flying everywhere,  
in and out of the penalty box  
as our points accumulated.

No one can say we didn't try:  
we played hard,  
got messed up,  
but we say,  
"You should see the other guy (or girl)!"  
The final score:  
8 us—them 0.

So, what's Clarkstown South going to say now?

—Jessica Rottenstein, Grade 10  
Clarkstown North High School  
New City, New York



*Illustration by Erika Fink, Age 13  
Whiting, Indiana*

## Her Feet

Every third period, I stand  
outside her room waiting for the bell to ring. And every day, I walk  
with her to her fourth hour class. I dawdle  
behind her so that her feet squash any freshman in our way. Those feet  
remind me of a two-door car with monster wheels. (They  
can carry her across a football field in fifteen seconds flat.)

In men's,  
she wears size thirteen shoes,  
Keds with white canvas and white soles.  
I listen for the squeak her shoes make every time she steps.  
Even if I'm a hall away,  
I can still hear her shoes.  
I haven't seen those bare feet yet,  
but if I did, I would imagine they'd be pretty. . .  
pretty scary.

—Grant Olan, Age 17  
Wheeling High School  
Wheeling, Illinois

## My Mind Got Loose

My mind got loose  
Like a big red goose  
I crashed into cars  
I chased it around the city  
I chased it around the state  
At last I found it on a car  
I picked it up  
Now all I need is a skull.

—Katherine Ratcliff, Grade 3  
Frances Xavier Warde School  
Chicago, Illinois

## Corner

"Go to the corner!" she said. I heard the voice echoing over  
and over after it was said.  
I went there, but the words weren't out of my head.  
Sitting alone and afraid in the corner, with darkness over me,  
The thick shadows were so black that I could barely see.  
I started to tremble even though I wasn't cold.  
I had to stay in the corner of death, like I was told.  
With my back turned to society, which I was once a part of,  
Now it seemed that compared to me, everyone else was above.  
I stared at the wall with the beige paint peeling and cracking.  
It seemed that now my life was lacking.  
Sitting on a wooden stool, colored brown,  
No more did I feel like the class clown.

—Sara Barth, Age 13  
Clarkstown North High School  
New City, New York



## EXCERPTS FROM A FRENCH SOLDIER'S DIARY

by Brandon Deweese

**M**arch 12, 1915—Today, I arrived at the front with the rest of my company after several months of intense training to fight the Germans. As far as you can see, there are lines already dug and others being dug on both sides of the front line. The sergeant said these are trenches that are being used to defend the front. However, it looks like a waste of time, men and money. We ate very well, but the sergeant told us it would probably be a while before we received another good meal because a lot of our farm lands have already been destroyed.

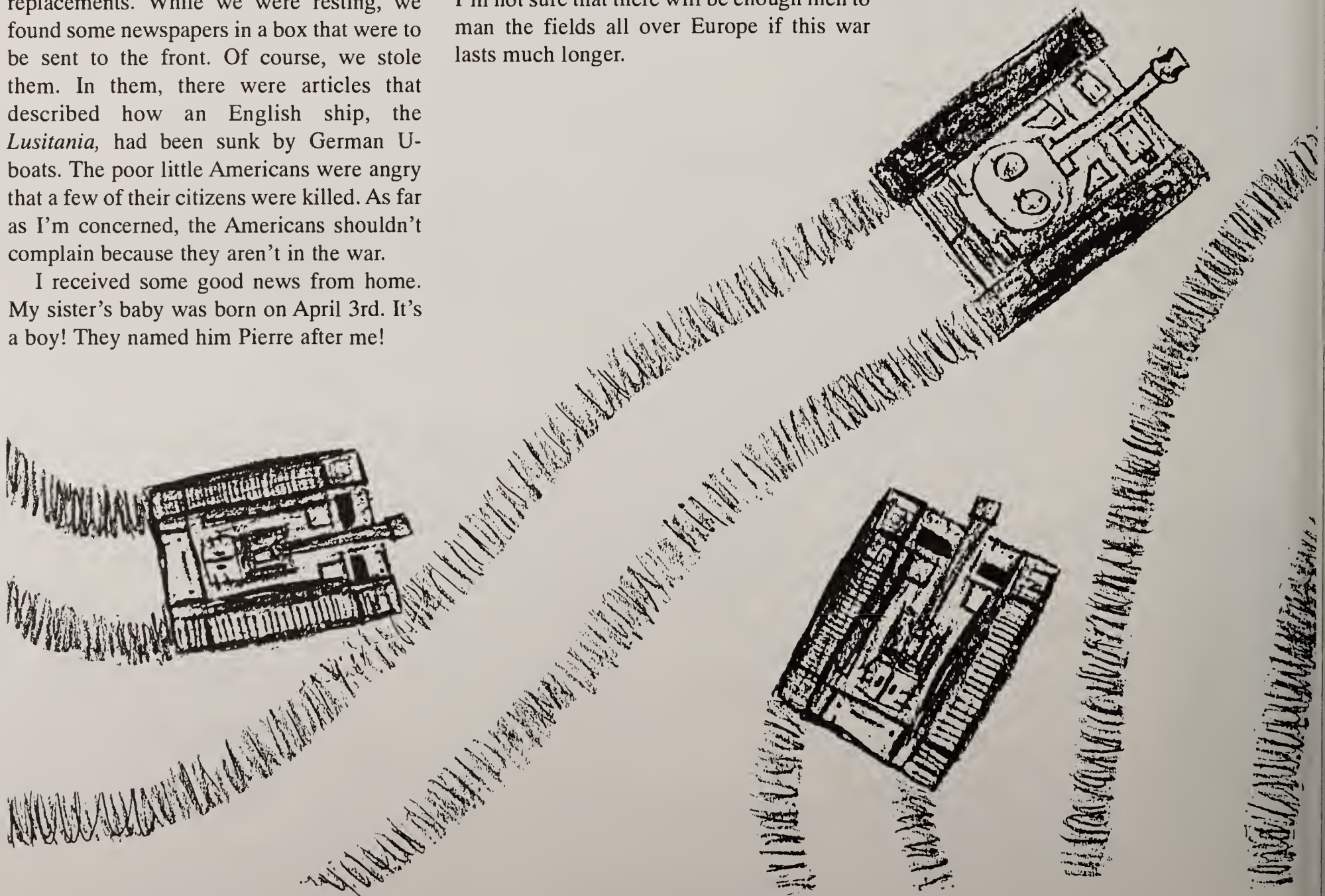
**M**ay 19, 1915—Our company, or what is left of it, was pulled back today for some rest and to receive replacements. While we were resting, we found some newspapers in a box that were to be sent to the front. Of course, we stole them. In them, there were articles that described how an English ship, the *Lusitania*, had been sunk by German U-boats. The poor little Americans were angry that a few of their citizens were killed. As far as I'm concerned, the Americans shouldn't complain because they aren't in the war.

I received some good news from home. My sister's baby was born on April 3rd. It's a boy! They named him Pierre after me!

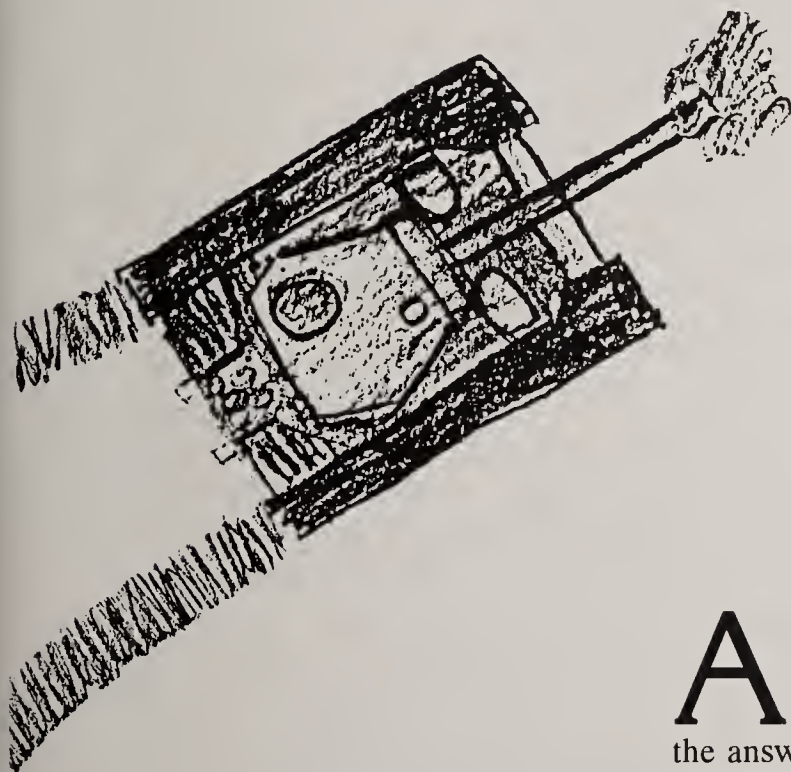
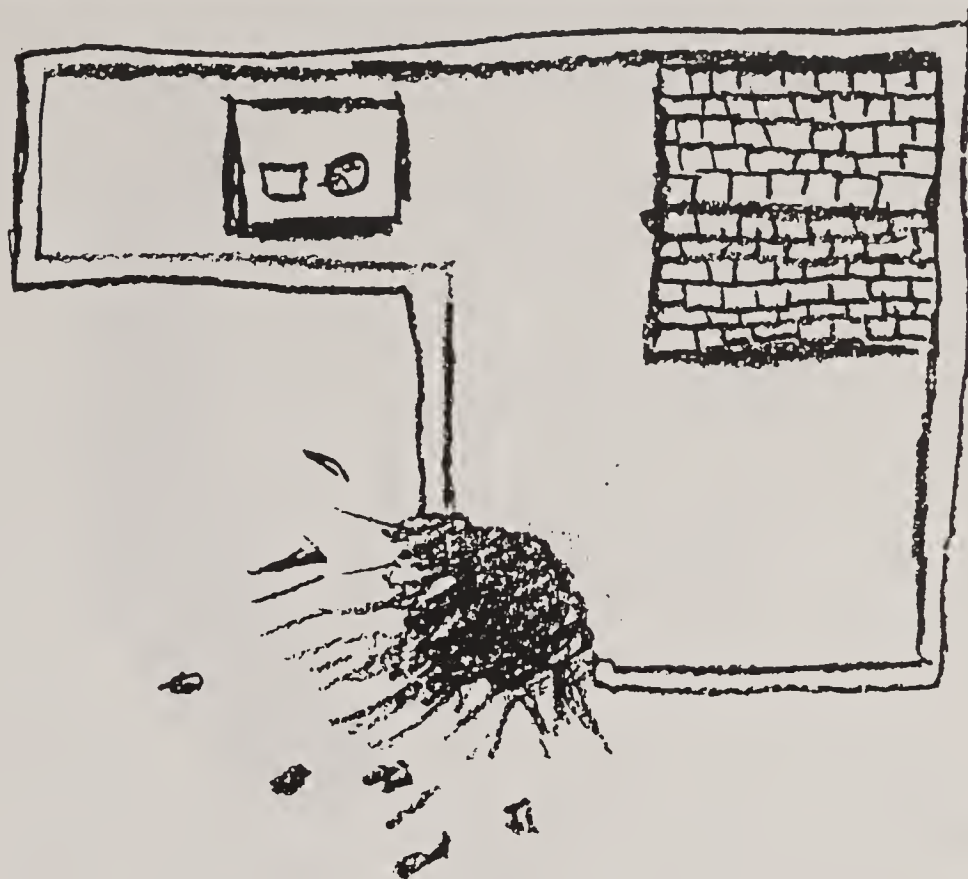
**J**anuary 8, 1916—I arrived with the rest of my unit at a little town called Verdun in a relatively quiet sector of the front. There are some fixed positions near here, but we've been ordered to fill trenches instead of fortify the fortress. I believe this is a mistake if the Germans do attack. There are many desertions all along the line. We've heard rumors of men just dropping their equipment and walking away. Some of them were from our own company.

**D**ecember 11, 1916—With winter upon us, the war has slowed down a little and news is slower than ever. But we heard of a British weapon called the tank that they used rather poorly. Perhaps, these tanks will help end the war; I'm not sure that there will be enough men to man the fields all over Europe if this war lasts much longer.

**F**ebruary 21, 1917—The United States broke political ties with Germany and the Americans may enter the war soon. If they do, they'd better be prepared to lose many men. I discovered this today after another German assault. I counted all of the men who are left from our training company and I found, to my astonishment, that only nine of almost one hundred are still here. Some of these men were just injured too badly to be sent back to the front. But over half of them were killed here on the "Western Front," as newspapers and letters from home call this battle line.







**A**pril 22, 1917—This was a good day. In the morning, we heard that the Americans had declared war on Germany a couple of weeks ago. This was because of a German telegram to Mexico called the Zimmermann Note that was supposedly intercepted by British Intelligence. I had hoped that the Allies would get the Americans in the war and they did. However, today ended in tragedy as we had to execute twenty of our soldiers who had deserted and were caught. It's awful to have to kill your own countrymen just because they are sick of this war and of the generals behind the lines.

**A**ugust 21, 1918—Our major counter attacks are beginning, and they are working to perfection. Tanks are the answer to the German trenches. All you need is a lot of tanks that bull through the lines with a few thousand infantry supporting them. It was awesome to see these huge machines pass over our lines and barrel through a hoard of Germans, taking land, that we had fought over for years, in just one hour. We may actually win this war after almost four years of fighting. Even though we must fight for a little longer, we should win.

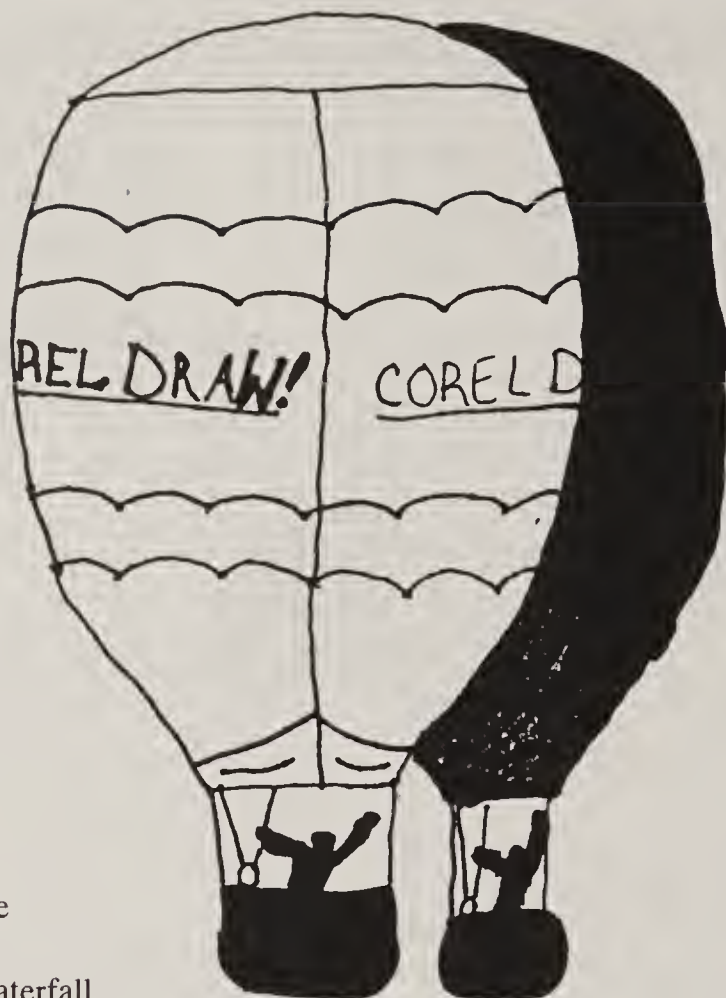
**N**ovember 11, 1918—After one last artillery barrage for good effect, the war is finally over. We celebrated all day and probably will continue to celebrate for many days to come. Awhile ago, I sat down and just thought about all the men I knew who had died in this war. I hope my infant nephew won't have to fight in any war.

**J**uly 5, 1919—We began to pull back to our staging area where we will be sent home to rejoin our families. Today, the sergeant announced that the Germans signed the Treaty of Versailles. In it, the Germans will have to pay us back for much of our losses, give us back the land they stole those many years ago, and accept blame for the war. It sounds good but, after my experiences these past four years, I don't expect anything to happen. If it does, it will be a long time coming. I just want to get back to my family and try to become a part of them again. We probably all have changed—me most of all. I've seen and done things that I can never discuss with my family because they would not understand. They will still think of me as the young one, the irresponsible one. That "old" Pierre is dead, along with many of his comrades. The "new" Pierre will be listening and watching for the signs of unrest among the nations that might be preparing for war again. Because there will be one. Of this, I'm sure. And when there is war again, there will be better weapons. Perhaps even bigger and better tanks and those aeroplanes that we heard about but never saw. More ways to kill men. It's almost as though I can hear the drum roll now.

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The Deweese National War History Museum

*Brandon Deweese, Age 18,  
lives in Hammond, Indiana.*

Illustration by Erika Fink, Age 13  
Whiting, Indiana



## Emerald

A forest, a jungle  
An amazon.  
An exploding waterfall  
Surrounded by lush.  
It is silky, sponge moss  
That grows alone quietly  
On the soft, moist rain-forest floor.  
The leaves, the grass  
These Eyes of the world,  
Are all spread evenly  
In emerald.  
It is river water  
That can cleanse and clean.  
It tastes of sweet liqueur  
Thick, sticky, and lime.  
A drop of cool water  
Splashing on the Earth  
From a drooping, tired leaf.  
The leaves, the grass,  
These Eyes of the world,  
Are all grown purposely  
In emerald.  
It hears stories of tragedy,  
Tears of desperation,  
And sighs of loneliness.  
It sounds of a wise old owl.  
Like an eerie whisper in the dark, misty woods.  
It is an omniscient smile,  
For it can see ahead.  
It is a secret.  
The leaves, the grass,  
These Eyes of the world,  
Have all bloomed brilliantly  
In emerald.

—Melody Moore, Grade 10  
Lewis and Clark High School  
Spokane, Washington

## Leaving

Before her on the dock they stood  
a string of awkward silhouettes  
against the porcelain shimmer of the bay  
like clumsy paper dolls  
pasted on the refrigerator door, they stay

—Walker Lewis, Grade 12  
Lewis and Clark High School  
Spokane, Washington



Illustration by Bryan Sherman, Age 8  
Hammond, Indiana

## Frozen Dawn

The morning light of the sky  
reflected on the still surface of the lake  
is the sky's mirror.

The dark purple hills are sleeping  
and soft drifts of violet snow lay under still trees.  
The world is cold and sleeping at dawn.  
A stranger appears over the edge of the hill—  
a dark dot on the soft snow,  
a flitting speck in the dreams of the earth—  
and is gone.

—Kasia Cieplak-von Baldegg, Age 12  
Shady Hill School  
Cambridge, Massachusetts

## Worms!

Wormy wormy, yuck yuck,  
My brother has a worm.  
A pet worm to be exact!  
My parents say,  
“No dogs, no cats,  
No four-legged things  
That can walk,  
They can’t talk.”  
I plead  
I beg  
For a dog.  
“Let’s get a bird, a turtle!”  
My parents say, “NO!”  
And send me to bed.  
In the morning I wake up  
And in my room are goldfish!  
“That worm will be my fish’s dinner,”  
I say.  
Wormy wormy, yuck yuck,  
My brother had a worm.

—Lindsay Parrott, Grade 3  
Frances Xavier Warde School  
Chicago, Illinois



## Chameleon

A chameleon sits among us—  
 Its masquerade much like our own.  
 It weaves a perfect clone of conformity  
 so no hollowness will be found.  
 It quivers in its secret,  
 cowers, from individuality within that could ignite,  
 and fears it will live and shriek.  
 And so, instead, it sits complacent and withers.

—Jenny Zimmerman, Grade 12  
 Lewis and Clark High School  
 Spokane, Washington



## Riding Away

A cold splash of bleach  
 Washed over my leg  
 As a bucket attacked me.  
 And a monarch butterfly beside me said—  
 “Come for a ride”

The clock chimed twenty-nine times  
 Dong. . . dong. . . dong. . . dong  
 As the infant monster screamed.  
 And a monarch butterfly beside me said—  
 “Come for a ride”

The numbers danced in my head  
 Mocking me from within.  
 And a monarch butterfly beside me said—  
 “Come for a ride”

A smoking, blond frog confronted me  
 As a black limousine chased me down the street.  
 And a monarch butterfly beside me said—  
 “Come for a ride”

And my shoelaces tried to tie me to the floor,  
 But suddenly I was naked,  
 Floating through the clear blue sky,  
 My butterfly friend beside me.

—Danielle Goder, Grade 12  
 Arlington Heights, Illinois

## SI•LENCE (si/lens)

entire absence of sound

There is the electric silence of a pause in a speech  
 There is the hushed silence of an expectant crowd  
 There is the soft silence of a country road  
 There is the dismal silence of a battleground  
 There is the taut silence between two who are angry  
 And then

There is the silence at night  
 When the lights are out  
 And the door is closed  
 And you can pull it up around you,  
 And wrap yourself in the darkness  
 And ride your thoughts

And I think

That is the silence that suits me best.

—Christopher Silverman, Age 15  
 Simsbury, Connecticut

Illustration by Jordan Carrico, Age 9  
 Munster, Indiana



## Common Creation

The air is still and quiet,  
 Like a blank piece of canvas waiting for paint.  
 Suddenly, the music starts,  
 The canvas is splashed with color.  
 Each instrument plays its part,  
 Patterns develop on the collage of splats and streaks.  
 The song winds down,  
 The painting emerges,  
 The orchestra puts down the instruments and the conductor steps down,  
 The painter walks away satisfied.

—Beck Sloman, Age 13  
 Shady Hill School  
 Cambridge, Massachusetts

## GENERATIONS

by Eryn Walanka

Sometimes I just sit like a neurotic fool on this worn, aging bed with the covers half on, hovering over me, but not suffocating me. The comforter creases like an old woman's brow, filled with wisdom and exaggerated experiences. I touch my own forehead, feeling a smooth, barren plain. I constantly wonder if, by the time my face is pruned and my shoulders are hunched, causing me to lose an inch in height, I will be telling my grandchildren my own exaggerated stories.

I look admiringly at my grandparents and wonder how they keep a smile, despite how life treats them. It relieves me to think almost everyone felt similar sometime in their life. But, I guess all that which is going on now will give me something to talk about later.



Illustration by Amanda Diehl, at Age 11  
Merrillville, Indiana

I can just sit comatose for hours and listen to my mama and papa tell me stories of tragedy, love, and even stupid things my parents did when they were younger, like my dad being afraid of getting dirty. Every time we go to breakfast at some restaurant, where I feel like I'm ten because everyone else is closer to 100, I force my mama to tell me about her life. I'd have to say it's not forced since she loves every second of it.

When my grandma tells each of her stories, it is with sincerity and some comical relief. I closely watch her sunken eyes light up, getting lost in her youth. I always make her tell me about this boy she had a crush on when she was little.

"When I was little," she says with a slight pause so she can think back to the exact age, "in about first grade, I had a crush on this boy. He was such a rotten boy. I don't know why," she said, "I liked him because he would spit on all the little girls." She giggled like a child and ended it at that. I love it when she tells how she should have known better. She's kind of proud of the fact that once she was very naive and innocent. She'll occasionally throw in questions, asking if I have a boyfriend or a crush on anyone, in kind of a gossip-like way.

"Well, not at the moment, but you know they are lining up," I just sarcastically retort.

"It's better off that way. Boys can be a pain in the butt. You've got plenty of time for that," she responds briskly.

"I guess," I doubtfully say. But, deep down I know she knows what she's talking about.

We go back to her second-floor apartment. I nosily pry through all her drawers, looking for the past. I come upon pictures of my grandparents, young and vibrant, smiling with crooked grins because the camera caught them when they weren't ready. I also find pictures of their parents, brothers and sisters. Sometimes, it's hard for me to imagine my grandparents young, with ice cream mushed all over their faces. There is proof with the photos. So, they had to be.

One time, I came upon a news clipping from when my grandma was eighteen years old. It was fragile and torn, slightly browned from age. At first, I looked at the picture to see if we looked similar. My eyes veered downward, noticing the caption below. The caption was faded; the only words I could get out of it were these: "stunned and grief-strickened. . ." then, "best friend killed herself on. . ."

I slowly read the article telling about how my grandma's best friend committed suicide at eighteen. Just then, my grandma walked in. I jumped, knowing I probably wasn't supposed to see this. She glanced down at the paper and her starry eyes turned sullen. I could see the hurt in her face and imagined how much pain she had encountered when she lost a friend who was so close to her. I gave her a sympathetic smile. That's all I could really do. I started to get a little teary-eyed. She sat down and told me about her friend and how much she missed her. At this point, her eyes drooped. I looked at her brow and thought this must have caused one of those beautiful wrinkles that has made her who she is today.

I'm looking forward to all those wrinkles—even the ones that are painfully chiseled from the inside. So, when I sit at breakfast with my grandchildren, I can touch my brow and tell a story.

*Eryn Walanka, Age 17,  
attends Wheeling High School  
in Wheeling, Illinois.*



## A Grain Of Salt

I am but one person  
In this very large world  
I am like a grain of salt  
In a huge bowl of popcorn  
If we all work together—  
All of the grains—  
We can flavor the entire bowl

—Stephanie Harrison, Grade 9  
Lewis and Clark High School  
Spokane, Washington

## Time Flow

Time slips through my fingers,  
like water through a strainer,  
with little chunks of memory,  
trapped in the metal mental mesh.

The water flows faster,  
as I grow older.

The chunks of memory, landing in stainless steel,  
bend it from a clean, round, half-sphere  
like when I was born,  
bent memories of childhood:  
setting up salt blocks at the edge  
of the woods to draw the deer out,  
running to Northfield Park,  
jumping in the sand,  
building sand castles,  
digging pits for my Tonka toy trucks.

The strainer, now an oval, not so clean  
as when it was new,  
the chunks of memory grow even larger as I age:  
worrying about the world,  
conscious of the economy,  
not wanting a WW III,  
more substance to these memories,  
weightier,  
how big will they get?  
I hope they never stop growing,  
better to know the world than  
watch the world slip through my metal mental mesh.

—Joshua Kucera, Age 18  
Wheeling High School  
Wheeling, Illinois



Illustration by Joshua Diehl, at Age 11  
Merrillville, Indiana

## Fall Equinox

The translucent warlock smiles behind a gravel waterfall.  
Feeble ripples of frost settle the ebbing tide of autumn  
Cursing a weeping willow with a winter's woe and ruin,  
Akin to a gargoyle grasping havoc inside his dim mind.

A tornado of firefly fairies twinkle,  
Dwindling down to him from heaven.

Sending a goblin vagabond an omen of time.

Like an electric entity,  
They free fall as one.

Fleeing like distraught skeletons,  
Myriads of mirrors melting before an indigo dawn.  
And the somber apparition becomes placid  
Before the diamond sun.

—Matt Cosby, Grade 12  
Lewis and Clark High School  
Spokane, Washington



Illustration by James Diehl, Jr.  
Merrillville, Indiana



## In A Cardboard Box

Gratefully, drowning  
in a sea of sound  
music flows  
through my veins  
electricity ricochets  
through my brain as the  
rhythm bursts into  
fireworks just behind  
my eyes  
sweat and a hazy cloud of smoke  
invade my senses  
as I breathe in life  
euphoria feeds my heart  
with the drum beats  
of the pagan pleasures  
but slowly that image fades  
as I look around at the  
solitary confinement  
I find behind these cardboard walls.

—Jay-Cee Compton, Age 17  
McLeansville, North Carolina

## THE VOICE

by Carly Barber

**H**er hair is thick—a soft, auburn color. It is pulled into a loose knot on the crown of her head with wispy strands hanging down around her face, giving it a softer look. Her eyes are a soft green and look gently upon the children with understanding and care. Her hands are soft and tender, welcoming to any child. They hold a book and write upon the chalkboard. She has a pretty smile—kind and compassionate. It would warm any child's heart.

Her voice, though, must be her greatest feature of all. It is soft and tender, and performs the many duties she must do every day. It explains difficult arithmetic problems on the chalkboard, which no one in the room would know but her.

Her voice reads a simple poem, giving it life and a deep meaning, while penetrating the words to the hearts of the children. It teaches them the lessons of life, which every boy and girl needs to know and teaches these lessons well.

Her voice points out bits of knowledge, which would otherwise be hidden, among daily experiences of people's lives. It teaches new

lessons, every day, to eager learners.

Her voice soothes a crying child with a wound, whether the wound be in the body or the soul. Her voice whispers words of comfort and makes the child cheerful once again.

The same voice that comforts also disciplines. It scolds a child that has done wrong. It teaches the child to learn from mistakes he or she has made in wrongdoing. It makes the child a better person in word and deed.

Her voice will laugh. Her voice will cry. Her voice will sing a happy song. Her voice will read a mournful poem. Her voice teaches a child to learn. Her voice is the voice of the teacher.

Carly Barber, Age 13,  
lives in Draper, Utah.



## Only Human

I sat there in the plastic swivel chair,  
studying my father's eyes.  
I never saw them like that before,  
so lost in thought. Bad thoughts.  
He paced the room, looking at the tiles.  
He slouched on the hospital bed,  
for the first time he didn't look superhuman.  
His head tilted toward the ground,  
but his eyes glanced up toward her face.  
She lay there motionless. Her eyes closed.  
She breathed only slightly. The room  
packed to its limits with sorrowed spirits: Father,  
Uncle Don and Aunt Marylin, Grandpa Marv, and  
my brother and sister.

The room reached a boil. I hugged my dad.  
I felt his shirt—melted to his back. I held his  
clammy hands. I couldn't stand hearing him cry.  
It sounded like a bad symphony rehearsing  
Beethoven's Fifth, two notes flat.  
His eyes reddened.  
The monitor hit a flat line.  
His sweaty shirt dripped.  
I handed him a Kleenex and hugged him again.  
Then I cried. For the first time  
I realized my father was only  
human.

—Jeff Becker, Age 17  
Wheeling High School  
Wheeling, Illinois



Illustration by Elizabeth Rodriguez, Age 9  
Valparaiso, Indiana

## Nocturne

Icy wind rushes through a frozen valley;  
in the distance a coyote howls.  
Trees glow in the moon's pale yellow light  
and footprints of squirrels and raccoons  
fossilize as snow turns to ice.  
Wandering deer shiver  
looking for food and a warm place to rest.

The stars reflect off the frozen lake  
and the faint click of a camera sounds,  
disrupting the scene for now,  
but preserving it  
forever.

—Steven Ostroff, Grade 11  
Clarkstown North High School  
New City, New York

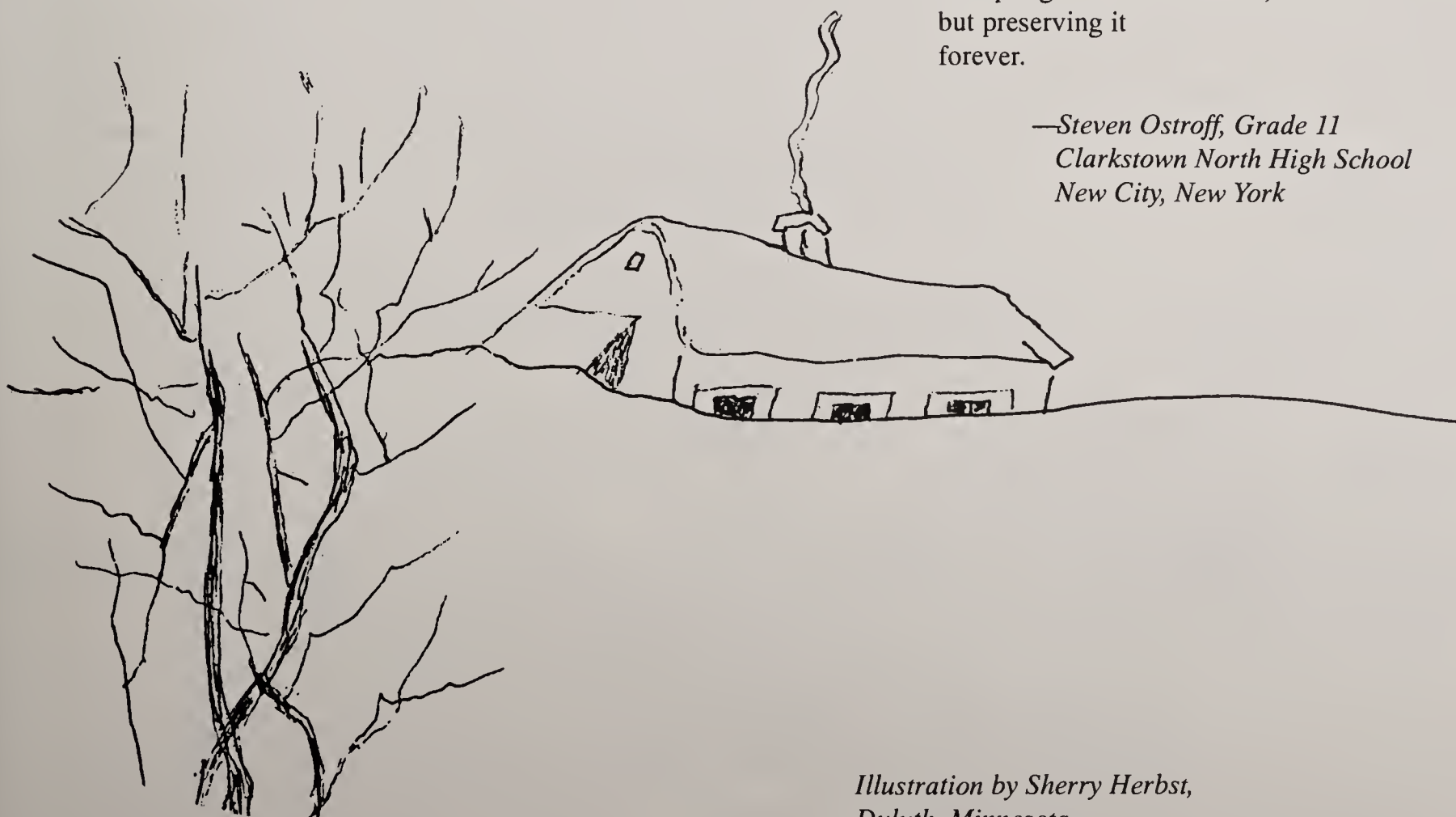


Illustration by Sherry Herbst,  
Duluth, Minnesota

## The Basement

The basement  
keeps secrets  
hidden between cracks  
of faded white plaster where  
voices whisper through.

The basement  
where the scent of mildew fills the air  
from the oil-stained carpet  
and the flood of '84—  
try not to breathe in too deeply!

The basement  
where mice play hide and seek  
and our cat has a meaningful day,  
watching and waiting  
for the hunt,  
ready to attack at any moment.

The basement—  
the washer and dryer's bedroom  
where they work  
and sometimes don't.  
Maybe they need to be fed  
something else besides clothes?

The basement  
where boxes,  
crates,  
old board games  
and holiday decorations  
hibernate  
till we wake them up  
in times of need.

The basement—  
is it just an underground room  
where we store old things  
we don't want others to see,  
or a mystical  
place that leads  
to another dimension?

—Kenneth Goldner, Grade 11  
Clarkstown North High School  
New City, New York

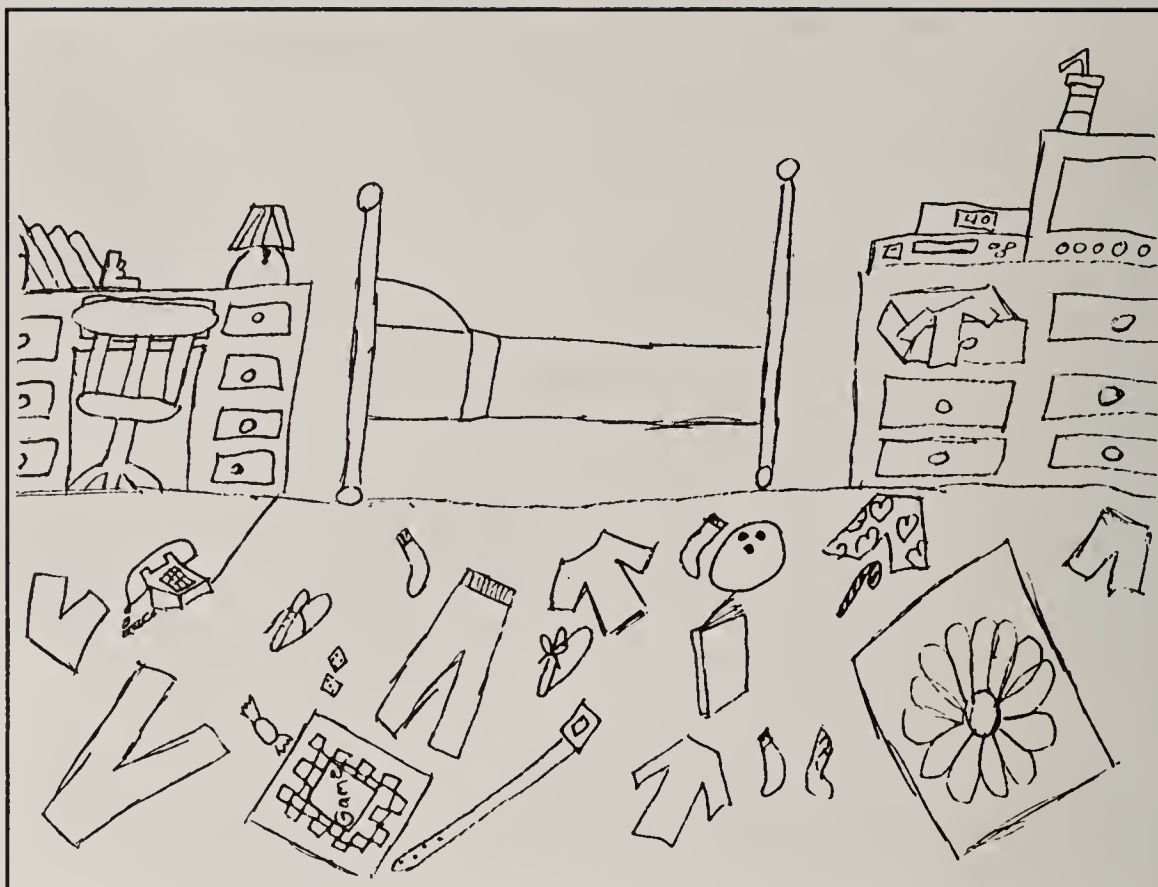


Illustration by Jackie Fink, Age 11, Whiting, Indiana

## Awakening Rain

This icy rain which claws at my cheeks,  
slides stinging under my eyelids.

My eyes are tired,  
but I open them (like a gift).

And I touch this rain,  
so like the one that pulled an aching current toward you  
as I held your hand holding my hand.

That rain glistened upon my hungry lips  
as your fiery warmth tingled within my skin.

I feel this rain—  
this rain so like the one streaming from my window-eyes  
that tugged at quiet leaves  
and drifted to the ground  
that night, soft as cotton, alone.

And I thirst  
for this rain  
that will wash me back into myself—  
flick light into my pockets, my pages, my life. . .  
And upon my awakening,  
envelop me into its new song.

—Maggie Goodman, Age 15  
Lake Oswego, Oregon

## My Secret Place

There is a little corner  
In my dining room.  
Very quiet and I stay there.  
I have nestled in it  
A picture of a space ship  
A frog  
And a bean bag.  
I like to  
Read  
Write and  
Draw there.  
When I get  
Mad at my sister, I go  
There.  
It's great.

—Ashley Muelhausen, Grade 3  
Frances Xavier Warde School  
Chicago, Illinois



# REJECTION LETTERS ARE THE "PITS,"

## Even For Me!

**I**n 1995, as I accepted the position of editor for the Young Writers section of *SKYLARK*, I asked myself, "How can our young authors and artists benefit from my being editor?" Pondering that question, I thought of my own attempts to have manuscripts published. This process can often be very frustrating—submitting work, waiting several months for a reply, and then receiving a very impersonal rejection letter. I wanted more encouragement than that for the youth who would be submitting to my section of *SKYLARK*.

Yes, I use a rejection form letter, but with my own customizing. I insert the acceptance at the beginning and a comment space under both the acceptance and the rejection portions. In that way, I may add pertinent critiquing and encouragement on each submission so its author may know exactly how I and my readers have reacted to the work. My thanks goes out to the many teachers who have worked with their students to develop their individual styles and then who have resubmitted their students' poetry and prose for our next issue. And as I have become acquainted with yearly submission names, I realize that some students had taken it upon themselves to improve their own work. When I became part of *SKYLARK*'s staff, little did I suspect that I would instill the needed confidence in our future adult writers and be rewarded with such a joy.

For all three years that I have been editor, my goal has been essentially the same—to publish dramatic stories, poems, and illustra-

tions. To my sorrow, space in my section does not permit me to publish each person that sends in a submission. At times, I have had to reject someone's good work only for lack of space. Then, there is the dilemma of how much area will give fair exposure to a school which has sent work from more than one class. Choosing just one or two pieces from the stack, when most of the stories and poetry are quite comparable, can be a soul-searching task.

**W**ith the help of my reading staff, I have sorted through each year's many submissions, finding several stories and illustrations at various levels of development. Keeping in mind the theme of each issue, we look for stories that make a point and that describe characters and settings, including sounds and smells, in original ways. Each story must display a clear beginning, middle, and end.

In our guidelines, I have specified that if dialogue is used it must sound like real people talking. Words used in poetry must aim for creating a picture in our readers' minds, for making them feel a strong emotion, and for pleasing the ear. Then, the attention that the student has given to spelling, punctuation, and grammar is considered. Of course, the work that has less errors will be a favored choice of an editor. And becoming skilled in proofreading would be an asset to any author.

Black and white illustrations that are creative, depict detailed scenes, and reproduce

clearly in the magazine receive my full consideration. After I have chosen and accepted the printed matter that I am going to publish, I find that making a list of illustrations for the artists that have made themselves available to my requests is an enhancement to my section. Many times, I have been delighted with the young people's improved versions of what my list requested.

In the future, I would like to see more local schools submit to *SKYLARK*, thus helping prepare many of our youths for a career in writing and illustrating. Perhaps conducting writing workshops would be a natural place for the schools to begin, if they have not already done so. On two occasions, August 26, 1996, and February 26, 1997, I was pleased to represent *SKYLARK* at Barnes & Noble Booksellers to reach out to more local teachers.

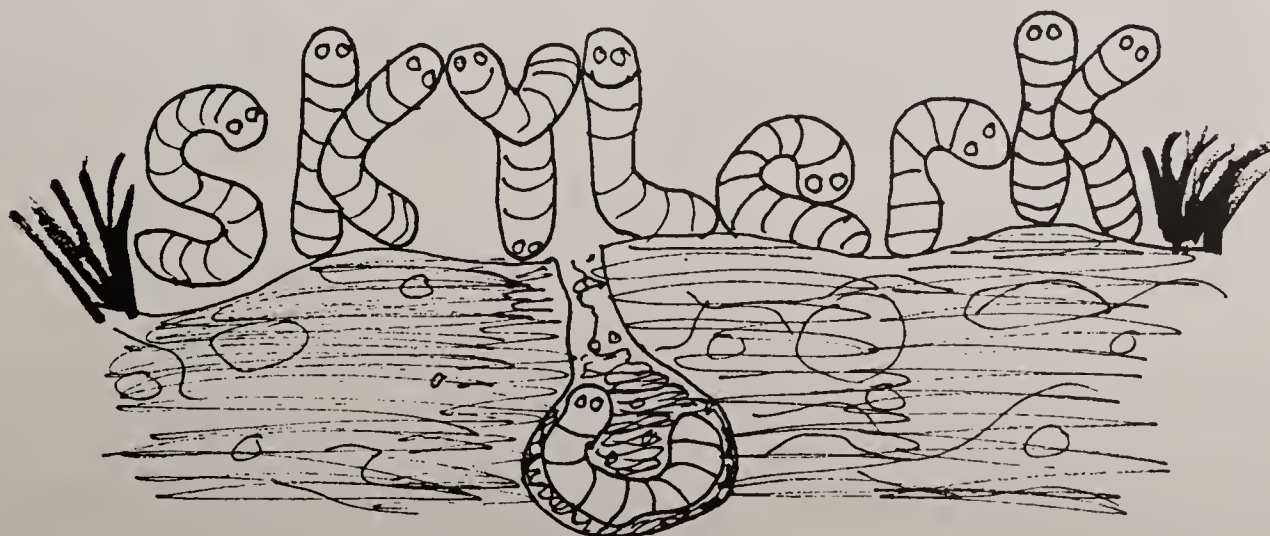
**T**oday, I feel that most of the young writers and artists have done a tremendous job of expressing themselves on paper. And for ten years now, *SKYLARK* has been an excellent vehicle for displaying the talents of our next generation of adult writers and artists. I'm grateful, and very proud, to be participating in such an important endeavor.

Best thoughts,

*Shirley Jo*

Shirley Jo Moritz  
Young Writers Editor

Illustration by Erika Fink, Age 13  
Whiting, Indiana



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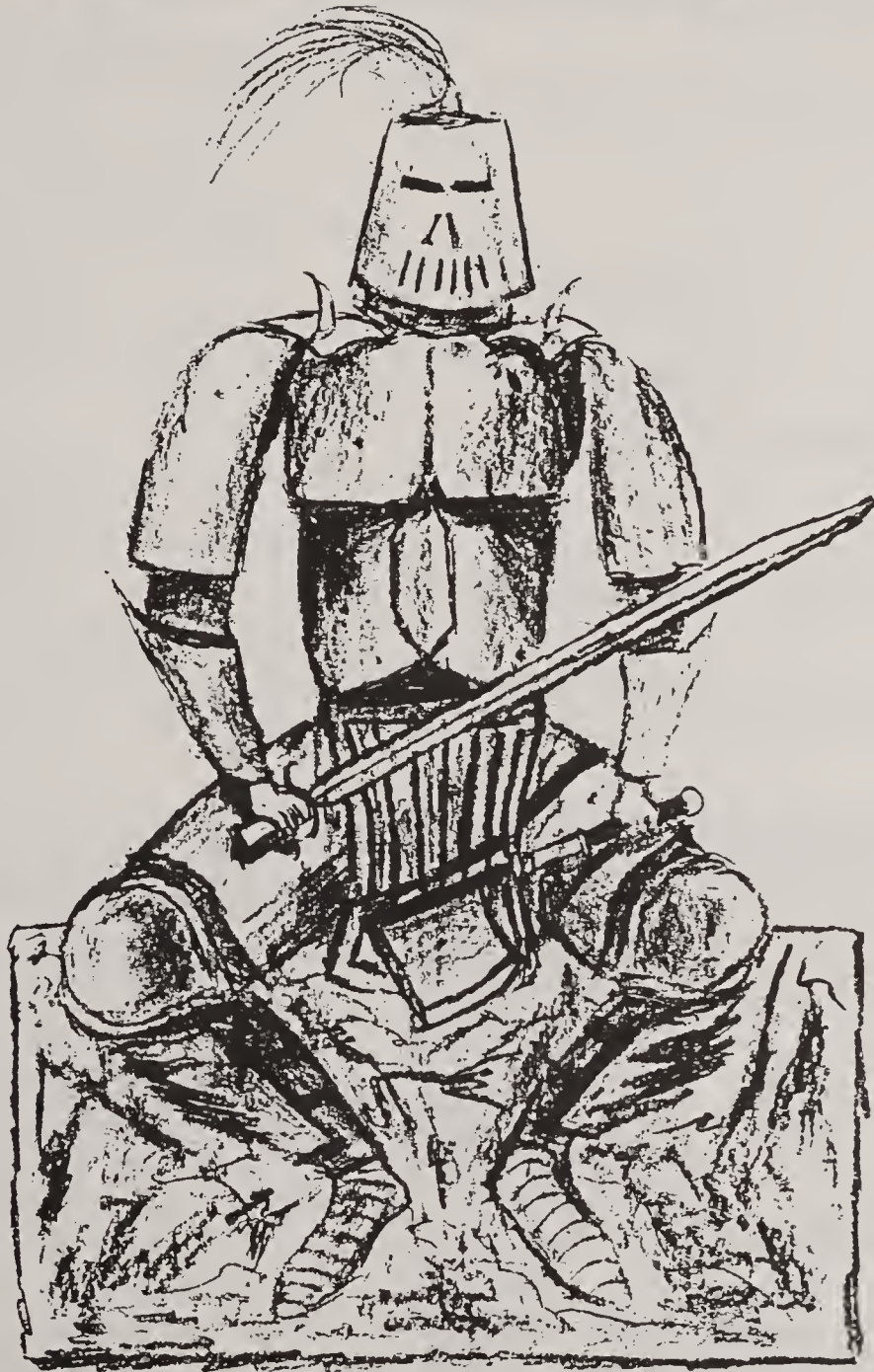
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CATTAIL

October, windy blue  
is in,  
the sky leaf-gold,  
the cricket slow,  
the moon  
a lost  
and ranging rose . . .

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in fat and lighting it,  
settlers used it as a  
*water torch*."

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and

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## INDEX TO GRAPHICS

	Page		Page		Page
Bachman, W.	44-45	Diehl, James, Jr.	78	Hunter, Erik	70
Barlow, Roberta	23	Diehl, Joshua	77	Johnson, K. Carlton	18-19, 37
Bunker, Marie	54	Fink, Erika	64, 71, 74, 81	Kingsley	21
Carlson, Melody	15	Fink, Jackie	66, 80	Rodriguez, Elizabeth	79
Carrico, Jordan	75	Fleming, Dale	1, 2-3, 11, 28-29, 31, 48, 52-53, 62-63	Sherman, Bryan	74
Conn, Jason	8, 32	Herbst, Sherry	79	Sherman, Erick	68
Deweese, Virginia	34-35	Hunter, Brian	58-59, 72-73	Wallace, Jaye	24-25, 46-47
Diehl, Amanda	67, 76			Wilson, Stacy	26, 39, 56-57

## INDEX TO HOME

Baker, Doris C.	58	George, David	62	Ortega, Vince	49
Bunker, Marie	54	Gibson, Christine	55	Robitaille, Dianne	63
Cash-Smith, Ruth	56, 60	Goldsmith, Sandra	63	Stamper, Nancy	61
Davis, Shirley	50	Hodor, Timothy	57, 63	Tapp, Kathy	49, 55
Galati, Michael	61	Komer, Gail	57	Zdonek, Raymond	55

## INDEX TO POETRY & PROSE

Baker, Doris C.	28	Hardy, K. S.	19	Perice, Glen	20
Barsoum, Marlene	15	Harrington, Dorothy	15	Petit, Diane	32
Belcic, Laura	18	Jeruski, William	47	Roberts, Stephen	24
Blanchard, Len	14	Jules, Jacqueline	14	Ruben, Laura	30
Brand, Tom	10	Keeling, Nancy	43	Saffir, Duncan	44
Brett, Peter	27	Kelley, Ward	24	Sech, Robert	16
Carlton, Robert	20	Kennedy, Mick	40	Sher, Steven	18
Carter, Sim	41	King, Nancy	20	Soledad, Starfire	25
Coleman, Earl	11	Kiser, Jean	23	Stamper, Gordon	19
Contreni, Rachel	31	Kniola, Marc	18	Staub, Anna Louise	44
Cooke, Robert P.	46	Kulick, Mariane	10	Stedler, Harding	9, 46
Deweese, Virginia	33	Laue, Gilbert	27	Stuart, Jane	31
Edwards, Angela	28	Luftig, Richard	32	Teichmann, Sandra	10
Farmer, Rod	18	Lunde, David	44	Tinkham, Charles B.	46
Ford, Jr., W.	9	McDonald, Debby	20	Waitts, Fileman	37
Fox, Hugh	47	McMillan, Linda	38	White, Henry	29
Gamble, Lois	25	McRay, Paul	9	Williams, Carrie	19
Goldsmith, Sandra	45	Meyerson, Henry	21	Wilson, Patricia	26
Greenblatt, Ray	45	Michaud, Michael	29	Winters, Mary	14
Grey, John	38	Myers, Steven C.	40	Zydek, Fredrick	10
Hamilton, Carol	40	Niditch, B. Z.	15		

## INDEX TO YOUNG WRITERS

Avery, Tasha	7	Green, KaSheena	6	Richardson, Sarah	66
Barber, Carly	78	Greenberg, Tina	69	Robinson, Charleena	6
Barth, Sara	71	Harrison, Stephanie	77	Rottenstein, Jessica	71
Becker, Jeff	79	Hernandez, Alex	67	Salinas, Rachel	65
Bennett, Kyle	65	Johnson, Traci	70	Schwartz, Lisa	68
Blackwood, Ian	69	Kelley, Lauren	6	Shrader, Grace	67
Campbell, Terrance	6	Kucera, Joshua	77	Silverman, Chris	75
Cieplak-von Baldegg, K.	74	Lewis, Walker	74	Sloman, Beck	75
Cohen, Yael	67	Martinez, Rosalinda	68	Stout, Krystal	7
Compton, Jay-Cee	78	Medina, Lucia	64	Thomas, Cami	7
Cosby, Matt	77	Moore, Melody	74	Villacin, Karla	7
Crawford, Sam	70	Muelhausen, Ashley	80	Walanka, Eryn	76
Deweese, Brandon	72	Ogle, Sandra	67	Warren, Zachary	70
Edens, Kim	65	Olan, Grant	71	Woodworth, Chris	65
Goder, Danielle	75	Ostroff, Steven	79	Zimmerman, Jenny	75
Goldner, Kenneth	80	Parrott, Lindsay	74		
Goodman, Maggie	80	Ratcliff, Katherine	71		



**for Larry Eigner  
victim of cerebral palsy**

were you handicapped?  
I'm not sure

you moved  
in strange ways—  
you were  
a tangle  
of gestures and feelings—  
you were  
a spider  
caught in the body's own web—  
shaking with fury,  
you would keep  
sliding out  
from under  
your own words—

strange people  
laughed at you,  
but were you handicapped?

your eyes were intense,  
like an Aztec priest  
you caught  
at my heart,  
you made me  
look at the world  
through narrow  
exploding windows,  
in the darkest of nights  
you would wake me  
to a nightmare  
of thoughts

but were you handicapped?

—Charles B. Tinkham  
Hammond, Indiana

